

Community Unit School District 200

Administration and School Service Center

130 W. Park Avenue

Wheaton, IL 60187

Phone: 630/682-2000

Fax: 630/682-2227

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Dear Families:

I'd like to begin this message by repeating a thought that I have verbalized many times since I became Superintendent in 1999. It is a truth that is as alive today as it was five years ago. District 200 is blessed with excellent teachers, outstanding students and supportive parents, a combination that by any measure allows our students to achieve great things both in academics and in extra-curricular activities. Thank you once again for your involvement in and support of our students and our schools.

High School Principal Selection

As most of you are aware, our two high school principals are retiring at the end of this school year. We started the process of selecting their successors last fall and expect to recommend the hiring of two new principals at the Feb. 25 Board of Education meeting. An administrative committee interviewed eight semi-finalists and then narrowed the pool to two finalists for each school. The finalists were then interviewed by a parent/staff committee and a separate student committee. Following each of those interviews, I met with the committees to hear what they perceived as the strengths of each candidate. Based on that information, my own interviews with the candidates and a visit to the school of the selected candidate for each school, I am recommending two individuals I believe can provide outstanding leadership at our two excellent high schools. Information about the new principals will be shared with parents and the media following the Feb. 25 Board Meeting.

Assistant Superintendent for Special Education

Our Assistant Superintendent for Special Services, Bev Becker, is also retiring at the end of the school year. We are following a similar process in finding Dr. Becker's successor. An administrative committee interviewed seven semi-finalists and narrowed the pool to three finalists. These individuals will be interviewed by a parent/staff committee early in March, and I hope to recommend a new assistant superintendent to the Board on March 24. Again, we will release information about the new Assistant Superintendent after Board approval on March 24.

The Future of Hubble Middle School

After many months of discussion and three town meetings, the Board of Education on January 28 decided the best long-term decision regarding Hubble Middle School is to replace it with a new middle school in the southwest part of the District. A citizen/staff committee will recommend to the Board the various aspects of implementing this decision. The Hubble Study Committee will be comprised of Board Members, Hubble staff, administrators, parents, community members, and representatives from the Wheaton and Warrenville City Councils, Park Districts and Chambers of Commerce. The Board's action carries with it no specific plans

for the sale of Hubble or the purchase of a site on which the new school would be built. The task force will be examining these issues as well as many others as it reviews the decisions required to implement the Board's plan. The study committee is expected to give a status report to the Board on October 27.

New 200 Foundation Donation

The New 200 Foundation, a non-profit educational support organization, has given nearly \$25,000 to District 200 this year to fund programs and the purchase of equipment. Much of the money was raised through the generous contributions of District 200 parents, who have the option of contributing to the Foundation through the school registration process. We thank the Foundation and our parents for making it possible to give our students and teachers opportunities they might not otherwise have. Most recently, New 200 gave \$8,000 to purchase technology related equipment to support new computers the District plans to purchase for the middle schools this year. A second award of \$6,400 was given to the District to continue training high school science teachers in the Modeling Methodology of Science Teaching, a US Department of Education award-winning way to teach science. Another \$10,000 in mini-grants was awarded earlier this school year to 20 teachers for projects they proposed to enrich the curriculum.

These contributions from New 200 are but one example of the generous support we receive from our parents and community. Our high school parent organizations and the PTA's in the elementary and middle schools provide hundreds of thousands of dollars in programs, services and equipment for our students each year. Our entire staff appreciates this generosity of spirit and support for our schools.

Finance Committee

A citizen/staff committee began meeting in January to recommend short and long-term solutions to the District's financial situation. The group's first task is to recommend how the District should address a projected \$5 million operating deficit in the 2004-05 school year. During the past two years, the District has reduced expenses by \$5 million, but continues to face operating deficits for the next five or more years. Deficits are currently covered by year-end balances, but those are expected to be depleted in another two years if steps are not taken to increase revenues or further reduce expenses.

The committee heard a grim report on the District's financial outlook earlier this month from PMA Financial Network, Inc., a public funds specialist that offers cash management services to public bodies. PMA prepared five-year projections based on historical factors as well as projected changes in state aid, property values, enrollment, salaries and benefits, and the estimated costs of doing business. Their report indicates the District will be \$19 million in deficit by 2009 based on their assumptions and no changes in the current program. PMA reported that these deficits are due to:

- The significant loss of tax revenue (\$13.6 million this year and a total of \$223 million between 2003 and 2009) due to the tax cap.
- The rising costs of health benefits, projected at 15 percent a year.
- The increased costs of providing programs required, but not fully funded, by federal and state laws.
- Salary increases for all employees, projected to increase at the current annual rate of 1.6 % to 4% depending on the employee's classification.

PMA went on to tell the committee that this financial outlook has the following implications:

- The quality of teaching and learning will most likely be impacted due to reductions in programs and services.
- The District's financial profile, using the state's criteria, will drop based on our deficit spending and lack of reserves, which are indicators of financial distress.
- The District's bond (credit) rating will drop, increasing the costs of borrowing money.
- Short term borrowing in the form of tax anticipation warrants will be required to meet expenses.

The PMA report is obviously not a final look at the District's financial future. But it does give all of us another indication that we must work together to find solutions to the very real financial problems that school districts across DuPage County and around the state are facing. District 200 is addressing this issue on several fronts. We are reducing our expenses each year through budget reductions and other operating efficiencies. We are also working with our elected state legislators to help them understand how their decisions in Springfield impact District 200. For example, we want them to know that even if they support the State Board of Education's proposal to increase general state aid, the amount allocated to District 200 would not return to the 2001 level of \$10.4 million until 2006.

This is the beginning of a discussion that we hope the entire community will become involved in as we seek to determine our budget priorities and how we can use those to ensure that future students have the same opportunities for success as those in the past.

High School Update

It's been close to a year since voters approved a referendum to renovate and expand our two high schools. During that time, our staff has been extremely busy preparing for the beginning of the major construction projects this spring. We expect to award bids in April for the construction of the classroom, performing arts and physical education additions at both high schools. We spent much of the fall and winter preparing the site for construction, bringing in utilities, leveling the construction surface and relocating detention ponds. At this point, we are on budget and on schedule and, as you may remember, at a cost to taxpayers that is about one-third less than we projected during the referendum campaign.

While construction moves ahead, we are continuing to update our high school curriculum and develop courses to meet the new, more rigorous graduation requirements that are in effect for the graduating class of 2006. New courses in technology and the fine arts will be introduced next year, along with updated curriculum in many science, math, English, history, business, music and physical education courses. Our teachers and administrators are working diligently to design courses that challenge our students to learn at the highest levels.

Thanks once again for all that you do to support our students and our schools.

Sincerely,

Gary T. Catalani, Ed.D.
Superintendent