

Community Unit School District 200

Administration and School Service Center

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Dear Families:

As another school year comes to a close, I want to thank all of our parents for their support in making this a successful year of learning for our students. I continue to be amazed and delighted at the extent of parent involvement we have in our schools, from helping in the classroom to chaperoning field trips, from baking for class parties to purchasing needed equipment and supplies for our schools. Truly, we have a great partnership between the home and the schools and we will work to make it even stronger. Before I move on to District updates, I want to extend special appreciation to the families of our graduating seniors. We thank you for all that you have done over the years to support our schools and students. If you will no longer have children in District 200 we invite you to come back and enjoy some of the many activities and productions that our students participate in every year. And we hope your student will find success in whatever he or she chooses to do after graduation.

From the District's vantagepoint, it's been a busy and productive year. We are especially proud of our work in the area of curriculum development. Following a systematic process, we have revised and updated many courses, created courses to meet the more rigorous high school graduation requirements and adopted a set of technology skills that students will be expected to master as they move through the grades. Teachers will be trained over the summer and throughout the next school year on implementing the new programs. The elementary math program is also under review and a new curricula will be ready to implement in the 2005-06 school year. None of this could be possible without the contributions of our outstanding teachers and staff who have dedicated many hours in planning and implementing these programs to benefit our students.

We are especially proud of our new technology program. In the elementary schools, technology will be embedded in classroom activities while students learn computer operations, keyboarding, information technologies and production and communication skills. The middle school technology courses--Computer Literacy, Information Technology and Applied Science and Technology--have been updated to reflect the new expectations for middle school students. A study of the elective program is currently in progress to determine how we can provide opportunities for all students to access these courses. At the high school level, students will have the option of selecting from among several courses to meet the two-semester technology graduation requirement. The new courses are Computer Programming 1 & 2, Information Technology 1 & 2, Introduction to Multimedia Design, and Web Design 1 & 2.

Although students have had opportunities to learn technology skills in the past, we have had no defined technology standards. It is now clearly stated what skills and knowledge we want

students to have in the area of technology. Our technology purchases are specifically planned to help students meet these goals. The elementary schools received computer upgrades this year. Middle schools will get them next year. The high schools received major upgrades in the 2002-03 school year. With the new technology standards, new equipment in all schools and a training program that will assist teachers in helping students use technology to enhance their learning, the District has taken a giant step toward preparing students for the experiences they encounter after high school.

Following is an update on some ongoing District initiatives.

Finances

As you know from reading my past letters, the District is in the midst of a financial struggle. A citizens Finance Committee met earlier this year and recommended the reduction of 20 teaching positions through retirement and attrition, increases in student fees and \$1.6 million in program reductions. The committee also recommended that the Board sell \$16 million in bonds to help the District get through the financial crisis that is affecting more than 80 percent of Illinois school districts. The Board acted on the fee increase in March, raising the basic registration fee for all students. The Board will be asked to consider the remaining recommendations on June 9. We don't anticipate that the Board will take any action on the recommended bond sale until the legislature decides how much money will be allocated to Illinois public schools next year.

I want to explain a little about the increase in student fees. The Finance Committee believes the new fee structure will simplify the payment and tracking process and save money for many families because there is no longer a fee for each non-athletic extra-curricular activity. The only increase is the basic registration fee, which goes up \$15 in the elementary schools, \$30 in the middle schools and \$50 in the high schools. This information will reach you in your child's school registration packet for the 2004-05 school year. While the staff was reluctant to recommend the fee increase, parents on the committee believed that fees should be increased, especially since the fees in many neighboring districts are much higher.

During the past two years, at the recommendation of two previous finance committees, we have reduced expenditures by \$5 million. We have been able to do that without major impact to the classroom, but we cannot continue to avoid disruption to the educational program unless we cut expenses or our revenue sources increase. This is an ongoing problem that will not be solved overnight, but I want you to be aware the school district is doing all it can to raise awareness of the problem and to find solutions. This includes working with our state legislators to change the way public schools are funded in Illinois.

Hubble Middle School

For more than three years, the Board of Education has discussed the future of Hubble Middle School. It has held public meetings, given status reports at Board of Education meetings, included information in District newsletters and gathered feedback. Following last fall's public meetings, the Board decided that it is the long-term plan of the District to replace Hubble Middle School with a new school in the southwest part of the District. A citizens' committee is now meeting to determine how the decision can best be implemented. At this time, the only decision that has been made is the one I just described. No land has been purchased. No deals have been

made. No property has been designated a Tax Increment Financing District (TIF). The Hubble property has not been sold. The City of Wheaton has not approved any development plans for the Hubble site.

The Board decided to build a new school rather than renovate the existing building because it believes it is a better long-term investment for District taxpayers and will result in a better educational environment for students. The committee has a number of issues to work through before it takes a recommendation to the Board. It will be looking for available property, examining alternate uses for the Hubble building and site, determining how to involve the public in the implementation process, discussing the feasibility of boundary changes when a new school is constructed and suggesting a referendum date. By the way, the Board has always intended to hold a referendum to get voter approval to build the new school and it formalized those plans in a motion on April 14. A status report on the committee's work will be given to the Board in October.

Safety and Security in our Schools

During the past five years, the District's Safety and Security Task Force has met every month to plan procedures and training to help our students and staff respond to emergency and crisis situations should they occur. One of the group's first tasks was to conduct a safety audit of each school followed by a parent/staff/student survey about safety. The results of these efforts focused task force work in the areas of security communication, crisis management information and training/evaluation. Following is a sampling of what the task force has accomplished:

Security Communication

- Locked and numbered outside doors.
- Required staff and visitor identification badges.
- Installed security cameras at school entries and on buses.
- Located offices at main entries in new construction and renovation.
- Perfected the use of two-way radios that provide a direct connection between principals, emergency personnel and the superintendent.
- Introduced an automated voice messaging system to notify parents within minutes of a school emergency.
- Installed emergency alert systems in each school that receive emergency messages from county agencies.

Crisis Management Information

- Developed and practiced procedures for seven emergency situations.
- Developed quick reference guides for each classroom.
- Selected off-site evacuation sites for each school.
- Created emergency bags for each school that contain all pertinent student information.
- Developed and stocked crisis kits for staff to use with students following an emergency.
- Designated fire lanes at each school to give emergency vehicles access to buildings.

Training/Evaluation:

- Wrote and produced the first three in a series of training videos to prepare staff for fire, lockdown and bomb threat situations.
- Supported annual police and fire personnel visits to all schools for training, inspection and unannounced safety drills.

- Conducted district-wide drills with authentic police and fire response for several emergency situations.
- Conducted debriefings with emergency and school officials following each drill to evaluate and improve responses.
- Assessed procedures every year and amended safety protocols as needed.

This work could not have been accomplished without the help of our local emergency officials who have faithfully attended and been an active part of the group's monthly meetings. It is this partnership that has made the work of the task force so meaningful and moved the District into a position of leadership in the area of school safety. I can say to you with great confidence that our schools are safer than they ever have been and that our staff and our students are prepared to respond when an emergency occurs.

High School Construction

Finally, if you've driven by either Wheaton North or Wheaton Warrenville South High Schools, you know that construction is well underway. The Board awarded the majority of bids for the high school work on April 14. The bids came in slightly under budget and allow the District to do everything that was promised during the referendum campaign without impacting the scope or quality of the project. The bids approved at the meeting will allow for the construction of general classrooms, art and performing arts classrooms, the relocation of administrative offices, boy's and girl's locker rooms, college/career counseling centers and multi-use field houses, as well as renovations within the existing buildings. We are truly excited about the construction and the opportunities that the 'new' schools will provide for students. Special thanks to families and students for understanding the inconveniences that the construction creates for your day to day activities.

I hope all of you enjoy the summer and find time for some family fun. Again, thank you for all you do in support of our students and our schools.

Sincerely,

Gary T. Catalani, Ed.D.
Superintendent