

Community Unit School District 200

Administration and School Service Center

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August 2003

Dear District 200 Families:

As I write this letter, teachers and students are just beginning the new school year. I hope you had the opportunity to enjoy some family fun and relaxation during the summer and are looking forward, as I am, to a successful school year.

As a school system, we are focusing our efforts this year on continuing our tradition of excellence in academic achievement and extracurricular competitions. From the Board of Education to the classroom teacher, from secretaries to custodians, we will be working in many different ways to take District 200 to the next level of greatness. We feel so strongly about this commitment that the Board of Education has made it one of its three high priority goals for the year, and each administrator will have it as one of his/her goals as well. Here are some of the things we will be doing to help us in our quest to become better.

- All schools will develop measurable goals to improve student achievement.
- All schools will develop achievement targets specific to each subgroup of students within their building, i.e. Title I, ESL/bilingual, low income.
- Staff will investigate models for strategic planning and be prepared to initiate the selected process by the end of the year.
- The curriculum development process will continue with the goal of making our instruction more rigorous and our content more current.
- Teacher recruitment and mentoring will be enhanced to ensure that all positions are filled with the most qualified candidates.
- A study of the middle school elective program will be conducted to give all students greater access to elective courses, including foreign language at an earlier grade.

Improving student achievement is always at the top of our priority list. We believe that as good as our test scores are, they can be even better, especially if we measure our performance by looking at the progress of specific groups of students rather than a specific grade level or the District as a whole. For our students to achieve at high levels, we believe they must learn in facilities that support instruction. That is why we continue to devote attention to upgrading our schools. Following is a progress report on the high school projects and planning for the future of Hubble Middle School.

High School Construction and Renovation

Thanks to our very supportive parents and community, the high school construction and renovation project is moving ahead on schedule. The Board of Education has taken two major actions over the summer to make this happen.

1. It approved a contract to resurface the football fields at both high schools to significantly increase their use. The \$1.1 million expenditure effectively expands the usable outdoor space at each high school by three acres. The fields that were once sacred to the football program in the fall and girls' soccer in the spring will be used throughout the school day, after school and on weekends for physical education, athletics, band rehearsals and other school and community events. While we had hoped that the fields would be ready for the opening football games at both schools on August 29, we knew it was a gamble when the contract was approved on June 25. We believe the benefits of the new fields for the long term far outweigh the minor inconveniences that the schools will incur for a week or so at the beginning of the year.
2. The Board also approved the schematic designs for the additions and renovations to the two high schools and authorized Legat Architects to proceed with the design development phase. The plans have only minor variations from the conceptual designs presented during the referendum campaign. This approval will enable the first phase of the project to be bid in early Spring 2004.

The Future of Hubble Middle School

As you are aware, this is an ongoing goal for the Board and the District. The focus remains on selling the Hubble property and building a new middle school in Warrentville, but much discussion remains before any decisions are made. We hope that by working in partnership with the Cities of Wheaton and Warrentville, we will be able to build the new school at a reduced cost to taxpayers. To that end:

- We are working with Warrentville city officials to develop a financing plan for the purchase of 10.4 acres of property along Herrick Road between Warrentville and Galusha Roads. Warrentville has agreed to reimburse the District for the purchase of the site with funds from the Cantera Tax Increment Financing District (TIF), but at this time the City believes it cannot release the funds until there is a firm commitment (via a successful referendum) to build the school there.
- We are also working with the City of Wheaton to plan a development on the Hubble site that will generate the maximum income from the property when it becomes a TIF. The higher the density on the property the more money it generates. The City is currently looking at a mix of business and residential buildings for the site.

Early estimates indicate the new middle school would cost \$26 million, plus the cost of the land which is \$4.5 million. We will continue discussions with both cities in an effort to reach agreements that will enable us to build a new middle school with the least impact to taxpayers. As this process moves along, there will be opportunities for parent and community involvement.

Long-term Financial Planning

Student performance is also impacted by the bottom line--the District's budget. The Board has identified long-term financial planning as its third high priority goal for this year. Managing the District's budget continues to be challenging given the state's operating deficit and the resulting decline in revenues we receive from the state. Despite more than \$5 million in budget reductions and fee increases during the last two years, the District projects a \$4 million operating deficit in this year's budget. The shortfall will be covered by cash balances, but we don't want to deplete those balances because they are needed to meet expenses between tax collections. As the

discussion continues, the Board will be looking at five-year financial projections and how we can continue to develop and nurture partnerships with our state legislators to help them understand how the state impacts local school district budgets. At this time, we anticipate that another round of budget cuts will be needed to help us move toward a balanced budget. If you have an interest in this area and would like to serve on a District Finance Committee, please contact my office at 630/682-2000.

On a related issue, we are asking parents for their help in increasing student attendance at school. Students need to be in school in order to learn at the highest levels. They also need to be in school if the District is to receive its maximum share of state aid. We were notified recently that our state aid is about \$900,000 less than we expected due to a decline in our average daily attendance (ADA) over the last year. A preliminary investigation suggests that the decline in ADA is due to a small dip in our enrollment as well as a higher than expected student absentee rate. Here are some ways you can help:

- Ensure that your child goes to school every day unless he/she is too ill.
- Plan family vacations to coincide with school vacations and holidays.
- Don't take children out of school the day before or after a school holiday or break.
- Schedule doctor and dental appointments before or after school. This is particularly important for elementary students because the state considers the student absent for ½ day if he/she is gone for more than 16 minutes. We have also asked physicians and dentists in our community for their help in scheduling appointments before and after school.

We thank you in advance for your cooperation in helping us improve our student attendance rate.

As the recipient of several federal grants, we are required to notify parents that if they have a student attending a private school within a 30-mile radius of the District the student may be eligible for certain benefits. Students qualify for benefits if they are eligible for their school's equivalent of financial aid or free and reduced lunch. If you have a student attending private school and wish more information, please contact our Director of Grants at 630/682-2007.

In closing, I'd like to invite you to attend the District's annual Parent University, sponsored by our school social workers. A variety of parenting sessions from *Internet Safety* to *Hormones in Nikes* will be offered from 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday, October 25 at Monroe Middle School. More information is available at www.cusd200.org or by calling Donna Kozica at 630/682-2165 or Gary Luckey at 630/682-7208.

I anticipate a great year in District 200. I encourage you to be active in your child's education and invite you to visit our schools as often as you'd like. Best wishes for a successful year.

Sincerely,

Gary T. Catalani, Ed.D.
Superintendent