

Community Unit School District 200

Administration and School Service Center

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September 2005

Dear Families:

This is the most exciting time of year for educators. Much like spring, it is a time of new beginnings, a time to recommit our efforts to helping all children succeed. We are truly focused on that goal and our work this year will continue to support our belief that all children can learn and learn at high levels. One early evidence of that is the notification we received this month that Johnson Elementary School and Monroe Middle School met the guidelines of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and are no longer on the list of schools that did not make what the legislation calls adequate yearly progress (AYP).

That didn't happen by accident. The entire staff at both schools developed strategies and programs to help students who are struggling in reading and math. The kinds of programs put into place at Johnson and Monroe to help students who are not meeting District and state standards are offered all over the District. Through their school improvement plans, schools are identifying specific areas of student need and then implementing strategies and programs to help them improve. Our staff is to be congratulated for their continuing efforts to help students to higher levels of achievement.

Improving student achievement is just one goal the District will focus on this year. The Board has not officially adopted its goal statements, but has informally agreed that it will have six goals, three of them continuing from last year and three new ones. The carryover goals deal with building a new middle school to replace Hubble, developing a long-term financial plan, and creating a new vision and mission statement. The new goals center on improving student achievement, negotiating a new teacher's contract, and increasing opportunities for the Board to interact with the community. Following is a brief update on these topics and others:

Hubble Middle School

Building a new middle school to replace Hubble remains a high priority as it has for the last four years. The District, the Hubble Study Committee, and individual Board Members, Administrators and citizens have worked behind the scenes and publicly to find appropriate property in the southwest part of the District on which to build the new school. There are barriers to all suitable sites, including the cost of purchasing the site and the interest of the owner in selling or trading the property for school purposes. I believe the Board will set a deadline for selecting a site and consider alternate plans if none is found. At this time, the alternate plans appear to be renovating the existing school or building a new school on the existing site.

Vision and Mission Statement/Financial Planning

These are separate but related goals. The District spent much of last year in research to determine what the community values in its local schools. More than 1000 people participated in focus groups to identify their expectations and to define what the District is doing well and where it needs to improve. Another 500 community members were selected at random to

participate in a telephone survey seeking the same information. (See more information on the back page.) All of the data collected is designed to give direction to two initiatives. The first is the development of a new vision and mission statement for the District. The second is the creation of a long-term financial plan. The Board plans to have the vision and mission completed in January and will then share it with the public for reaction. Once formally adopted, the Board plans to appoint a citizens finance committee to develop recommendations based on the vision and mission statement and the information gathered from the focus groups and survey.

Increase Student Achievement

Although a goal to increase student achievement may not be formally adopted by the Board each year, it has been the top priority in this administration since I became superintendent in 1999. As mentioned above, we have worked extensively with the schools on the development of their school improvement plans and the identification of specific improvement targets along with purposeful activities to help us meet them. We have also targeted our staff training to give teachers new strategies for teaching struggling students. Additionally, we know from research and our own experience that students achieve at higher levels when their parents are involved in their school and their learning. Please take that as an invitation to know your child's teacher(s) and what they are studying in school each day. If you have questions, our teachers are easy to reach. Each one has a voice mail box and an email account, both of which are listed on the school's web page. Or you can simply call the school office and leave a message. Our teachers understand the value of your involvement and will work with you to make it meaningful for your child.

Teacher Negotiations

The current teachers' contract expires at the end of the school year in June. It was originally negotiated in 2001 for a three-year period and then extended for one year during each of the past two years. It is the Board's goal to negotiate a new contract by the end of the school year that is fair to teachers and taxpayers and provides financial predictability and stability for the District. The formal part of the negotiations process will start early in 2006. The contract with the District's classified staff—secretaries, custodians, aides, etc.—also expires at the end of the year. Negotiations with the Classified Employees Association will also occur this year with a goal of completing the process by the end of the school year.

Communications

The Board of Education would like to increase its visibility in the community and provide additional opportunities to talk with parents and residents about their questions and concerns. Among other things, Board Members will be attending meetings of civic and parent organizations and community activities and events with a goal of increasing interaction with its various stakeholders. We will also be working to increase our communications with those who do not have children in the schools.

Following is an update on some other topics that may be of interest:

District Newsletters—by Mail or Email?

You may recall that we asked for parent email addresses during the registration process so that we might increase our communication with you electronically. Those of you who provided email addresses may already have received information from your school via email. This letter is the first attempt at sending District information using those email addresses. Those who provided them should receive this letter electronically; those who did not will receive it via

regular mail. If you get a paper copy and would prefer an email copy, please notify your school office. We hope this method of communicating will better serve your individual needs and also save the District money in paper, printing and postage.

Food Service

Families are probably aware by now that the District has a new food service provider this year. Sodexo was selected over several other companies, including our previous vendor Chartwells, during a highly structured bidding process. Sodexo brings several enhancements to our food service program, including the opportunity to pay for meals and access menus on line through the District's web site at www.cusd200.org. Because the District is part of the National School Lunch Program and therefore receives federal and state funds to subsidize food costs, the food choices offered to students are highly regulated and must meet certain nutritional standards. At the middle schools and high schools where students have options, Sodexo has embarked on a healthy snack initiative which will increase the variety of choices as well as their nutritional value. The District also is continuing its efforts to increase the healthy options available to students in vending machines. Although students may still purchase soda from vending machines, they may also choose such items as milk, juice, yogurt, water, and flavored sports drinks. We will continue to work with Sodexo and other vendors to make healthy food choices available to students during the school day.

High School Construction

I hope you have all had the opportunity to drive by or visit one or both of our high schools in the last few weeks. The buildings have been transformed into vital learning centers thanks to the support of our community. We are two years into the renovation and expansion of the schools and I'm pleased to report that we are ahead of schedule and under budget. The mobiles that dotted the campus at both schools are replaced by two-story classroom additions. The one at WWSHS was completed last spring and the phase one classroom addition was ready for the opening of school at WNHS. The second phase is under construction and should be completed by spring. The commons at both schools, which augment cafeteria seating, are used throughout the day for other purposes and serve as a gathering place for spectators and audience during evening events. The new counseling centers are also up and running, giving students more resources to plan course selections and research college options. Both field houses remain under construction, although the one at WNHS is expected to open in December when the flooring is completed. WWSHS's field house is scheduled for occupancy in the spring. Once completed, times will be scheduled to open the field houses for community use. These schools reflect the pride that students, staff, and community have in their schools and, importantly, provide the spaces students need to be successful learners. Both schools have already had opportunities for the public to come into the schools and see the new spaces, and we are planning a larger, more formal event in the late spring when the schools are substantially completed.


Technology

Although we have cut our technology budget this year to help reduce costs overall, we have several initiatives in place that will help students and parents. Volunteer teachers in four schools will be piloting the TeacherEase on line grading system, which will enable parents to access their child's grades and attendance record from home or office. When the pilot is complete we would expect to extend the program into all schools. The high schools will receive new computers and software for math, reading and science labs. Finally, we hope everyone will benefit from our new online calendar, which enables users to access scheduled activities in one or more schools

simultaneously with just a few simple keystrokes. If you haven't done so already, check out the calendar on the District's web page at www.cusd200.org or on each school's web page.

In closing, let me thank you again for your support of our students and our schools. We look forward to another great year of teaching and learning.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary T. Catalani". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G".

Gary T. Catalani, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Focus Group and Community Survey Results

Below is an abbreviated list of the common issues and District responses that emerged from the focus groups held last February and the community survey conducted in June.

Here's What You told Us	Here's What We're Doing
Maintain High Quality Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salaries are competitive. • Professional development is targeted, funded and emphasized. • Mentor program offered for new teachers. • Facilities are new or upgraded. • Administrative support is strong. • Students are active learners.
Maintain Extra-Curricular Programs, including Athletics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs maintained at same level for four years. • Special Olympics program added last year.
Maintain or Reduce Average Class Sizes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class sizes are lower this year than in previous years, particularly at the elementary level.
Provide Quality Curriculum and Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous improvement model is followed. • Student achievement is increasing. • Two schools moved off AYP list.
Have High Expectations for Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduation requirements were increased three years ago. • Enrollment in advanced level courses has increased. • More Advanced Placement courses are offered with more students enrolled. • Fewer remedial courses are offered.
Provide a Safe and Secure Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Safety and Security Task Force has worked over the last six years to make District 200 a leader in school safety in areas ranging from building security, to staff training in emergency responses, to the use of two-way radios connecting fire, police and school officials.
Provide Student Computers and Educational Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A technology curriculum is defined for all levels and is integrated into all new curricular adoptions. • A minimum of one computer is available in each classroom. • Resource labs in both high schools are equipped with multiple computers. • A multi-year technology plan defines technology deployment. • Web based learning is offered in certain situations. • Credit recovery is available on line in some instances.

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Office of the Superintendent

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