

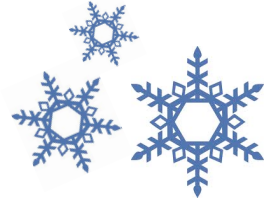
FRANKLIN LAKES PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Frank Romano, III, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

January 06, 2014



Members of the Board, Administration, Faculty, Staff, Parents, and Guardians,

As we move away from the close of 2013 and into 2014, a community like ours can't help but reflect on our past, set goals for our future, and live in the moment with pride and appreciation. We are a community that exercises collaboration and partnership in order to ensure the development of children who are creative, adaptive, resilient, and aware. We value teaching and learning, and we certainly perform well. Likewise, we stress our value for character, kindness, and work ethic. We've accomplished so much during the most challenging times in public education, and we have so much for which we can be thankful as we realize the fruits of our labor and plan our next steps. Throughout these past four years, I have experienced firsthand the wealth of ingenuity, integrity, and generosity that we model for students. The following are only some of our major initiatives that highlight who we are, and I thank you for your parts in all of them:

✧ **Effective Partnerships and Collaboration**

So much of our success comes from our strong partnerships and purposeful collaboration. The strong ties between and among our Board, Administration, Education Association, PTAs, Education Foundation, Police Department, Borough Officials, and parents and guardians lead to strong foundations and, at times, take us beyond our means.

✧ **Safe and Secure Schools**

Shortly after coming to Franklin Lakes in July of 2010, I began conversations with our Board of Education about the development and implementation of comprehensive plans, procedures, and mechanisms that provide for safety and security in our schools. I worked with our School Business Administrator to make a case for updating and improving our facilities and modernizing and standardizing our plans and practices. Since then, not only have our facilities and plans improved but also our expectations of action, our measures of support and accountability, and our articulation. Our joint work with the Franklin Lakes Police Department and StoneGate Associates (our safety, security, and emergency management consulting service); the dedication and hard work of our administration, faculty, and staff; and the cooperation of parents and guardians continue to ensure greater safety for all.

With each passing year, we have taken increased measures such as but not limited to video surveillance, visitor access protocols, staff training, student practice drills, and the like. Gratefully, school violence is extremely rare, yet we must do all that we can to minimize the likelihood of an occurrence. Working together, we continue to provide a safe environment for all.

✧ **Solid Programs**

Safety comes not only in physical and organizational forms but also social, emotional, and academic. In addition to our efforts to secure buildings, we have implemented programs such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program that instill character and reduce aggression (e.g., harassment, intimidation, and bullying). We have seen dramatic reductions in not only HIB incidents but also violence and vandalism. For example, we have seen a drop in violence incidents from twenty-one (21) in 2011-12 to only two (2) in 2012-13. During these past two years, we have seen only one incident of vandalism. Incidents of HIB have gone from nine (9) to two (2) during these past two years. This year, we have seen only four (4) suspensions



to date. Overall, our students report feeling comfortable and safe in their school environments. They report confidence in the system and clearer understandings of their roles as reliable and contributing members of our learning community.

In the area of academics, we've engaged in deep and meaningful curriculum work in mathematics and language arts at all levels, which have positioned us very well for New Jersey's adoption of the Common Core State Standards. Of course, the success of this work has much to do with the faculty and staff, both in and out of the classroom. Their desire to refine their craft and their commitment to our students and our system is inspiring.

We re-opened the FAMS library media center and are currently working on a well-articulated K-8 library media services curriculum with an emphasis on research protocol and information literacy. With the help of the Franklin Lakes Education Foundation, we saved our Discovery Room Program and continue to benefit from FLEF's support of all our school programs.

In all of our program efforts, we look to maintain our best practices as we discover solutions to new challenges.

* **Multiple Accountability Measures to Both Drive and Evaluate Teaching and Learning**

As the State continues to require very different ways of evaluating districts, schools, administrators, teachers, and students, we have taken every opportunity to challenge ourselves in ways that not only satisfy the State but also enrich our local efforts to serve children well. In order to accomplish this, we use multiple accountability measures to evaluate teaching and learning. We recognize the value of what the State proposes and understand that eventually it will provide meaningful feedback. We know too that even when the State meets its goals, we will always need additional measures to assess our effectiveness. In addition to State testing, we develop internal benchmark assessments in all subject areas, use standardized benchmark assessments such as the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), and we utilize nationally normed assessments such as the WrAP writing assessment in Grades 3-8 and the Cognitive Ability Test in Grades 3 and 5 to provide a more comprehensive understanding of student, teacher, school, and district achievement.

We continue to work collaboratively with our FLOW partners on initiatives in such areas as math, special education, and general professional development. We continue to engage parents in better understandings of their children's learning through such efforts as the development of standards-based school report cards and the creation and implementation of Common Core aligned rubrics.

* **Strong Personnel and Personnel Systems**

Representative parents, teachers, administrators, and board members have come together to help me fill key leadership positions such as the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Colonial Road School Principal, Franklin Avenue Middle School Principal, High Mountain Road School Principal, and Woodside Avenue School Principal. We created and filled much-needed Language Arts and Math staff development positions that will help us bring greater depth and consistency to what we deliver in Grades K-8.

We now have personnel systems that are in compliance with State regulations and expectations; all faculty are appropriately certified and have gone through criminal history checks; strong and consistent evaluation systems for administrators, faculty, and staff are in place; evaluation practices are consistently and regularly documented and performed; important accountability measures such as lesson planning are in place; administrators have a clear understanding of the expectation and the need to work together to support a school system rather than a system of schools; job application processes have moved from paper to a powerful online database system. We have so many reasons to celebrate our successes while pacing ourselves as we move the District forward in very meaningful and contemporary ways.

* **Innovative and Responsive Resource Integration**

We are fortunate to have a wealth of technological resources that support all aspects of the school organization. Powerful systems drive everything from administrative tasks to dynamic learning opportunities.



Teachers in Grades PreK through 8 engage students through online curriculum resources that strengthen the home-school experience; web-based research, testing, and learning tools that support instruction; interactive white boards, iPads, laptops, and Kindles that make learning exciting as they support individualized, small group, and whole class activities.

One particular example lies in a most recent FAMS technology integration initiative. Late this past summer, teachers received Macbook Air laptops to replace their classroom desktops. This allows teachers more flexibility to continue to integrate technology into the classroom on a daily basis. Prior to the opening of the 2013-14 school year, all teachers were given extensive training by Apple representatives on the functionality and integration of the technology of the Macbook Air into the classroom. In our continued efforts to identify the educational needs that ultimately drive the integration of technology, we continue to investigate the implementation of a Learning Management System (LMS). The LMS would support teacher investigations, provide educationally appropriate online content, and allow for more regular, instantaneous, meaningful, exchanges between teachers and students. We look forward to realizing the full potential of our efforts.

* **Communications**

The District launched its new website in the spring of 2011, providing all stakeholders with the tools and the information that they need to function more effectively. Those efforts continue to grow and serve us well. All faculty members have voice mailboxes and classroom websites. You can access a voice mailbox by calling a building and selecting Option #1 for a complete mailbox listing for that site. Every faculty member has a webpage where he or she posts 1) an introduction to the classroom, procedures, etc., 2) office hours, 3) a bio and educational philosophy, 4) resource links and documents, and 5) homework.

During the 2010-11 school year, we introduced School News and Views through semi-monthly e-blasts. Then we shifted to Facebook, and now deliver School News and Views via both Constant Contact and Facebook. Each edition features not only district and school posts but also Board of Education posts and posts on behalf of our school partners (e.g., PTA, FLEF, Borough, FLOW).

We have expanded the use of the Genesis Parent Access portal at the Middle Schools and introduced it at the Elementary Schools. Parents now have access to schedules, attendance, report cards, contact information, and more.

At the start of the 2011-12 school year, we converted to a new voice and text notification system for reverse 911 and e-blast messages. E-blasts now come from our Global Connect System and provide direct system access for principals and department heads; they can now send timely messages directly to their school communities.

These are just some of the major efforts that the District has made in an effort to connect the various groups that make up our school community.

* **Respectful and Responsible Balance**

We can be very proud of our efforts to support our school system while remaining responsible to all taxpayers. Examples of care and expertise abound in Franklin Lakes. In 2012, the EPA's Green Power Program, awarded our "initiatives and stewardship." Through the use of energy efficient technology, we have significantly reduced energy consumption and carbon emissions at Franklin Lakes Public Schools. Our new lighting systems alone will save us close to \$43,000 per year in utility costs. The reduction in energy consumption decreases carbon emissions by 116 tons per year. This is equivalent to eliminating 21 cars or planting 574 trees.

We look for cost savings opportunities by partnering with neighboring districts. We continue to explore new systems, structures, technologies, and methodologies in order to deliver optimal services, manage cost effectively, promote safe and productive learning environments, and maximize returns on our infrastructure investments. We have developed budgets that have fallen well within the 2 percent cap, and then returned hundreds of thousands of dollars in remaining funds to homeowners. We have pioneered such areas as additional health benefit contributions and merit pay incentives. We exercised employee health care



practices that saved the District close to \$600,000 per year prior to the new State's employee contribution requirements. We continue to look for more optimal ways of doing business, such as bringing our payroll system in-house. This not only saves us \$25,000 per year, but it allows us to more efficiently connect Personnel with Finance.

Along with these sound practices and initiatives, we continue to grow our programs and improve our operations. By utilizing alternative sources of revenue, we have restored our Middle School Library Media Specialist and various staff development positions. We have sustained critical positions like Director of Curriculum and Instruction and those that enhance our system, such as Discovery Room Teacher. Our Bright Horizons Pre-school Program continues to expand, serving both our general education and special education populations. We continue to grow high quality Special Education Programs in-district, which provide over \$1.5 million in revenue in addition to yielding several hundred thousand dollars in cost savings.

Again, these are only some of the major initiatives, and as you know, there is wonderful work occurring in buildings and classrooms on a daily basis. Given all that we have accomplished together during these past four years, one can only imagine the heights to which Franklin Lakes Public Schools may rise in the years to come.

We remain focused on our schools, preparing each one of our children to not only survive but also thrive in the world. I thank you for making me proud to serve as your superintendent of schools. I wish you and your families a happy and healthy New Year!

Sincerely,



Frank Romano, III, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

