

**2009-2010 Accomplishments Report, Part 1  
To the Parents and Community of Secaucus**

**“Excellence in Education for Your Child Is Our Primary Concern”**

**From Cynthia Randina, Superintendent**

The successes that students and staff enjoyed throughout the 2009-2010 school year were due to a lot of hard work, training, and consistent focus on goals by students, staff, and central office and school administrators; we owe them all thanks for many jobs well done.

In this week’s report, I have included some highlights from across the district, and from our high school. Next week I will report on the middle school, and elementary schools.

Both reports include some of the areas you may care about most: academics, your students’ successes, the safety and character of students and schools, technology, and accountability.

The two Goals of the Board of Education and a third to satisfy community recommendations and state requirements were pursued successfully this year as a focus for our work, as you will read in the highlights below:

- I. To analyze the data to revise curriculum and instruction to improve student achievement
- II. To enhance the use of technology integration to promote learning, communication and administrative efficiency
- III. To address students’ social, emotional and character education needs to promote individual student well being, safety and security, and to continuously improve climate and culture

**Across the District**

**Interactive Whiteboards and Video Servers Captivate Interest in Learning**

Interactive whiteboards captivated the attention of students and teachers alike. In all classrooms, a Promethean or Smart Board was installed, and video from Safari Montage servers in each building gave classrooms access to thousands of learning clips across all subject areas. Teachers received in-depth training throughout the school year with ongoing support, and we implemented two additional technology labs in the library for teacher use in training, and as a place for teachers to collaborate in developing and practicing technology-based lessons, as well as to use with their students.

## **Online Lesson Plans Build a Learning Community**

Online lesson plans for teachers helped teachers to work collaboratively to improve and share plans for instruction within grades and departments across schools; incorporate state standards, higher order thinking, and professional guidelines; include links to technology directly in their plan documents; and archive their plans for next year. Administrative review and accountability for quality planning increased, but with far more efficiency. Ongoing support and training for teachers were provided.

## **Educating Students for a Better World**

Character education and maintaining a learning culture and climate for all students at all grade levels, were enhanced through a district-wide program, working with the Rutgers University Civic Engagement and Service Education Partnerships Program, and the combined efforts of teachers and administrators through the district's Professional Development Committee and Climate and Culture Committee. A culture and climate survey was given to students, teachers, and administrators at all levels, interpreted with Rutgers' help, and improvement recommendations were implemented, based on the data. These will promote the prevention of bullying and substance abuse, and address character building and social-emotional well-being.

## **Secaucus High School**

### **Improving Academics at Secaucus High School; 100% Passing Rate**

SAT, state graduation tests, and state subject tests were all subjects for improvement at Secaucus High School, along with other academic areas and an infusion of Higher Education.

A 100% cumulative passing rate was achieved at Secaucus High School; all students required to pass the state graduation testing requirements in the HSPA and AHSA program did pass, even before the final opportunities offered by the State. Students, teachers, and administrators put in extra work with the students who needed extra help to ensure that everyone passed in time for June graduation. HSPA preliminary results show that the high school's passing rate for General Education students, and Total students overall, continued to exceed State and Federal requirements, and a greater percentage of students achieved an Advanced Proficient rating in both Language Arts and Math in 2010 as compared to 2009. Also, Special Education students improved overall in 2010 as compared to 2009.

To help students get scholarships and admissions to their colleges of choice with enhanced SAT scores, the Secaucus district began a partnership with Princeton Review, one of the nation's leading SAT preparation programs. Over 60 Juniors were enrolled in the full improvement course, and two out of three students saw an improvement in scores. District administrators analyzed detailed data provided by the testing program in the spring to give teachers precise

areas for future improvement in the district curriculum, for example revealing that students knew angles better than circles in math, and adverbs better than conjunctions in language arts.

To help ensure that Secaucus students succeed when they get to college, Accuplace testing prep courses were used to identify students' college level academic needs, and to enhance their performance in these post-college admissions tests to prevent the need for our graduates to spend credits on remedial coursework in their early college years.

To meet tougher graduation requirements next year, Biology and Algebra both received curriculum reviews and strengthening this year, as well as additional professional development activities for subject leaders among the teachers, to help ensure that Secaucus students pass new testing programs in the subject areas. The block scheduling system was modified to extend math, English, and science instruction across both semesters in all four years.

Higher education-based programs were brought to Secaucus High School through the efforts of district staff. The district began engagement with the Syracuse University Project in Forensic Science, and a Future Teacher Academy program was built this year for students to grow with next year. Course-work with New Jersey City University and Hudson County Community College will be done at Secaucus High School. An Associate of Arts (AA) two-year college degree in pre-school group teaching can be granted at graduation from Secaucus High School.

### **Secaucus High School Seniors Ready for Jobs: New Internship Program**

The 2009-2010 Secaucus High School Career Exploration Internship Program was launched this year with 25 students participating in the pilot group, and 50 applied for next year. The students who were accepted went through a rigorous assessment process that evaluated interests, abilities, values, learning styles, and personality types; wrote essays and signed contracts indicating their commitment to the program; and developed resumes and were interviewed.

Internship sites were approached in the fall semester, and students spent the spring semester at their sites during the second half of the day. Sites included local businesses such as the Secaucus Animal Hospital, Marra's Pharmacy, and Apprehensive Patient; the Municipal Building in the courts and at the police station; and in New York City including high finance firms, fashion houses, celebrity event planning firms, filmmaking companies, magazine publishers, and a cancer research hospital.

All interns turned in weekly time sheets, journals, and assignments, attended seminars to discuss experiences throughout the semester, and developed a project based on their internship which they presented at a formal Recognition Ceremony. The students overwhelmingly reacted very positively to the program and demonstrated measurable growth in their development of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that will benefit them in their college and career experiences in the future.

There is also a summer pilot program underway, where 15 students were selected by the same assessment process in the spring and will attend their internships for the full day for 5 weeks from the end of school until early August.

To enhance the program, middle school students underwent career assessments to support them during high school; we will be offering our first ever Career Education course; and the district has applied this year for a \$300,000 grant next year to enhance the program further.

### **Special Education Students Achieve Even More**

These academic accomplishments for graduation and college included our Special Education students as well. Our high school Special Education students surpassed the State target for percentage graduating with a regular diploma (86.7%), and surpassed the Special Education State targets regarding dropout rate (0%). Seven of our Special Education students participated in the Career Internship Exploration program during the Spring and Summer of 2010, including two with job coaches at local businesses, improving their post-high school options. For even more options, the first Special Education College Night was held in November with about 40 attendees. The Special Education students were given extra training this year in Self Advocacy, in meetings occurring throughout the school year including visiting/speaking engagements at another school district, and local presentations.

Special Education teachers also received extra training this year to help students pass the HSPA testing and the percent of grade 11 Special Education students passing on the first attempt did rise in 2010 as compared to 2009.

### **Student Safety and Security Improvements**

Student welfare and security are always a focus of effort by school staff.

A powerful radio base station was added to the high school main office for communication with hand held radios throughout the building and 5 more hand held radios were added in the spring for better building coverage.

The school administration and Substance Abuse Coordinator worked together to give extra help for drug avoidance to students who have had positive drug tests, through a hair-testing program as a follow up procedure during and after rehabilitation that determines usage in the prior four months.

The school administration maintained a strong working relationship with the Secaucus Police Department and school board attorneys to ensure that School Board policies were properly enforced throughout the school, to benefit the safety and security of all students and promote the learning environment. We also created plans and began to implement swipe cards and a 21<sup>st</sup> century video camera system for next year to prevent intruders, and applied this year for \$81,292 in federal matching funds next year as a joint grant project with the Secaucus Police Department.

## **In the Playoffs: 14 Secaucus High School Varsity Programs at County/State**

Secaucus High School athletics experienced what can well be summed up as one of the finest in school history. Fourteen varsity programs participated in County and/or State Sectional post-season playoffs.

In fall sports, the volleyball, football, and girls' tennis teams captured BCSL League Championship titles, the volleyball team won the county championship, and the football team and girls' soccer teams played in the State Sectional Finals.

In winter sports, the bowling team captured the BCSL League Championship and the State Sectional Championship, while the girls' swimming program won the North Hudson Championship.

In spring sports, the boys' tennis and girls' softball teams made the county Championship Finals and the softball team captured the League Championship title, and the girls' Track & Field team won the North Hudson Championship and the County Freshman-Sophomore Team Championship.