

Public School District **Secaucus**

2009-2010 Accomplishments Report, Part 2 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 last week’s report, I included some highlights from across the district, and from our high school. In this week’s report are 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

Last week I detailed many enhancements across the district. Two of them in particular should be highlighted again this week because of their strong positive impact on your children in the middle and elementary schools:

Increased integration of technology was provided to all students and teachers through implementation of Promethean interactive whiteboards in each classroom (or SMART touch-sensitive interactive whiteboards in the lowest grades) and Safari Montage video clip servers.

Teachers all received ongoing training and support in the use of these tools to ensure that they were comfortable with their boards and knew how to use them well for your students, to captivate students’ attention, excite them about learning, and bring the world into the classroom.

Secaucus Middle School

Math Goes Online! Upgrade for Grade 7 and 8 Mathematics

Online access to the publisher's website for the textbook, and other online help, were part of a new textbook series in Grade 7 and 8 to help students meet the challenges of high school math. The Prentice Hall Mathematics Course 2 for grade 7 and Course 3 for grade 8 are designed to prepare our students for algebra, develop their problem solving skills, and integrate technology into instruction. Ongoing assessment of students was provided online to assist teachers in monitoring and modifying instruction for individualized assistance to each student.

We're a Middle School (Not a High School)

Your middle school age children deserve their own school experience, separate from the older high school students, and that's just what we did this year. After careful and extensive planning, the use of the building was reorganized from the time the buses arrived to the time the students left, to create that separation including bus drop-off and pick-up locations; entrances and exits; internal barriers in corridors using existing fire doors; scheduling of rooms, classes, and extracurricular activities; and administrative vigilance to ensure that the separations were respected by all students.

Extra Care for Students

To take extra care of students in and out of school, a district-wide Climate and Culture Committee was formed to make and implement recommendations. Two programs focused on middle school students were begun this year: NJ CAP (Child Assault Prevention), and Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Hudson County, with a great track record in helping students, along with prevention of bullying and substance abuse, and character and social-emotional education.

Middle School 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.

Clarendon and Huber Street Elementary Schools

The "Three Rs" – Even Stronger with 7 Improvements

Improving "The 3 Rs" to give your child an even stronger foundation in reading, writing, and arithmetic, was the main focus of our work in the elementary schools for 2009-2010 and beyond. There were 7 different, coordinated improvements that the elementary teachers and administrators made this year. Count them!

1. The reading curriculum was improved with implementation of the “Reading Streets” Literacy Program for grades K-2, which will continue with them into grade 3 next year, and with NJASK preparation workbooks in grade 3 this year. The Reading Streets textbooks are more closely aligned with the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards and therefore with the testing specifications for NJPASS grade 2 and NJASK grade 3, which are based on the Standards.

2. The math curriculum was improved with implementation of the “EnVisions Math” Program for grade 6 which will extend into grade 4 and 5 next year, and with NJASK math online preparation for grades 4 and 5 this year. EnVisions emphasizes pre-algebra skills that will help the students to be ready to pass the new State test in Algebra 1 that they will be taking in middle school or high school.

3, 4. Extra help in both math and reading for students who need it was implemented in two programs, an ongoing “Basic Skills” Program before and during the school day for grades 2 through 6, and the Jumpstart Summer School for grades 3 through 6, both last summer and this one (2009 and 2010).

5. Math and literacy coaches, expert and experienced master teachers, were established in each school to aid in reading, writing, and math instruction, to assist teachers by modeling lessons for students in these areas, and to help teachers integrate technology and other new programs into their classrooms.

6, 7. Measuring students’ math and language arts progress carefully was improved with technology for online testing in the fall and early spring, using CPAA (Children's Progress Assessments) in grades K-2, and PTS3 (Progress Toward Standards) in grades 3-8. Also, end-of-year NJPASS testing in grades 1-2 was implemented so that students will be familiar with the state NJASK testing in grade 3, as well as to measure their performance comparably to the NJASK test, and to provide teachers with the tools to help students progress.

Student Character Building – Even Stronger with 3 Improvements

Students learn character in school by serving their community, and by targeted programs. Programs for “service learning” to combine community service and academic subject lessons were implemented for elementary students. To measure and speed up progress, an improved system was implemented for student data including attendance and a disciplinary infractions matrix, and recommendations based on student and teacher survey data were implemented from the district’s Climate and Culture Committee.

Special Education– Even Stronger with Improvements for All

Helping both regular education and special education students this year, modifications to expand special education students’ programs were made that changed how their educational services were delivered.

Special education students at more grade levels were included in the regular classroom experience, for those who were able, instead of remaining exclusively in a special education classroom separated from their peers. Inclusion teachers from the Special Education Department were used in all grades Pre-K through 6 to expose their students to regular content material in the classroom, helping the students to improve academic achievement, to build self-esteem in the regular education setting, and to develop socially. The regular education students also developed socially, gradually reaching out to the special education students, accepting them as equals with unique strengths, and helping them to achieve. Overall, the district surpassed all State targets with 59.9% of Special Education students removed from regular education for less than 21% of the school day.

To help teachers help students and support the inclusion of Special Education students in regular education, Special Education teachers receive training in new Math and Reading Programs with regular education teachers to promote inclusionary practices, and all teaching assistants received training in Positive Behavioral Interventions to assist their students in integrating into regular classrooms.

Special Education students remaining in self-contained classes also benefitted from programs that used hands-on activities and incorporated technology into the classroom, such as touch-screen interactive Smart Boards online to district software and the Internet. Students were able to use the hands-on activities and hands-on technology to explore and gain insight into many different topics, while learning in different ways to fit their personal needs.

The Special Education students in self-contained classes also participated in a district-wide Special Olympics program.