

Our vision is a professional learning community where instruction invites effort and supports academic rigor for all students and educators.



From the Desk of Superintendent Thomas A. Forcella

Guilford Public Schools • *Focused on Learning*

Charting the Course

January 2010

GUIDING COALITION

At the 2009-10 opening of school ceremony, the idea of creating a “Guiding Coalition” for the Guilford Public Schools was presented. The purpose of this group will be to guide us through the next phase of our development as a learning organization. The Guiding Coalition will serve in an advisory capacity as we move forward with our vision of creating a true collaborative culture that is focused on instruction and learning. My hope is that by gathering together a diverse group of thinkers, planners and researchers, we will increase the chances of accomplishing our vision of high-level learning for all students.

Currently, our model for change is initiated through the District Leadership Team comprised of the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Director of Pupil Services, and building principals. Input is also solicited by administrators from various stakeholder groups including teachers and other staff members. The Guiding Coalition will add another layer to the decision-making process regarding change in our schools. This group would be educated with regard to the most up-to-date research on educational change and learning theory as it relates to the Guilford Public Schools in order to provide guidance to district leaders and the Superintendent. The Guiding Coalition will include teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, a Board of Education member, and students. The commitment would be for two “retreat type” meetings a year with additional readings and research between meetings.

If you are interested in participating as a member of this team, please send an email to me (forcellat@guilford.k12.ct.us) expressing why you think you would be a good candidate.

FISCAL YEAR 2010-2011 BUDGET: OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE

As each of us knows, the economic crisis that reared itself last year is still upon us. As a school system, we are re-examining all that we do in order to develop a budget that is reflective of the current economic times while still moving us in a positive direction. Preparations for the FY 2010-11 budget have been most difficult. At the building level, Principals and program leaders have worked hard with their staff members to find as many areas for savings as possible.

The State of Connecticut has reduced the amount of money towns receive by means of the Excess Cost Grant. This funding designed to mitigate the higher cost of educating special needs students has been reduced for this current budget and will be reduced again next year. This dilemma along with fiscal obligations such as negotiated contracts, health benefit agreements and other fixed costs are the cause for significant increases in the new budget.

Our charge during this fiscal crisis is to view the situation as an opportunity to channel our resources on the most important thing we do and that is instructing students. Assistant Superintendent, Dr. Keene, and I have been visiting faculty meetings and receiving input about what is important in what we do as a learning organization. We have been discussing the importance of collaborating and thinking differently in tough times. In all of our meetings with staff it has been clear that a priority must be placed on instruction and student learning.

As we move forward, we will keep parents, students, staff, and the community informed about the FY 2010-11 budget by communicating the key changes and explaining their impact on staffing, programs, capital expenditures, and operations. Your input is welcome and encouraged. Public hearings on the budget will be hosted by the Board of Education on January 25 and 26 at 7:30 p.m., at Adams Middle School.

Unfortunately, it is clear that significant budget reductions in both operations and staffing will be required to accomplish the budget goals of the Town. These are trying times, and public schools are not immune to the national economic fallout. I feel positive that we can meet the demands of the fiscal crisis while continuing to offer as good if not better programs for the young people of Guilford.

LEARNING WALKS: TEACHERS OBSERVING TEACHERS

The Guilford Public Schools are focused on increasing student learning. The district is committed to cultivating a collaborative culture for both staff and students that will foster an environment where everyone learns from each other and instruction in our classrooms continues to improve.

Learning Walks provide our teachers with the opportunity to observe each other in their classrooms in everyday situations. Small groups of colleagues visit classrooms at pre-determined times to observe the student learning process, take notes, talk to students, and later provide feedback. The feedback is constructive, not critical and the teachers being observed are not identified by name. The goal is to learn from each other in a non-threatening, cooperative environment.

As of this writing, Dr. Keene and I have participated in five district-level Learning Walks in our schools. As we have traveled through over 130 classrooms in the last two months we have gained valuable insights into classroom practices that will guide us in our efforts to support educators. The Learning Walk teams have been most impressed with our teachers focus on the Principles of Learning and overall commitment to improving instruction in Guilford Public Schools. It is evident that we are on the cusp of creating a very dynamic learning organization.

GHS RECOGNIZED AS ONE OF THE NATION'S BEST

The annual *U.S. News and World Report* study of American high schools has named Guilford High School as one of the best in the United States. Over 21,000 public high schools including charter and magnet schools were analyzed and judged to be at a "gold," "silver," or "bronze" level. The top 100 schools received gold status while just over 400 were recognized with a silver award. There were no gold winners in Connecticut. Guilford was among 12 silver recipients and was the only New Haven County school recognized. The criteria for recognition included a review of state tests and advanced placement participation and scores.

Obviously, the entire school district should feel good about this recognition. All the work that has been accomplished in this district in curriculum, professional development and the focus on instructional improvement K-12 has contributed to the establishment of a "high expectations" learning culture.

Congratulations to all!

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YEAR 2010-2011

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