

Peru Central

Cross-Campus Web-based Update

HIGHLIGHTS OF SCHOOL BOARD ACTION TUESDAY NIGHT

At the regular monthly meeting of **Tuesday, January 13, 2009**, the Board of Education:

- A. Welcomed High School Junior Class President Lydia Price, featured for this month's report on extra-curricular student activities, leadership development and service. Peter McCormick & Bruce Beauharnois are faculty advisors.
- B. Acknowledged all who are associated with the two and one half years of diligent effort, staff accomplishment and student achievement gains associated with the comprehensive re-establishing of the Peru CSD early literacy development program, as documented in the fall 2008 comprehensive program monitoring audit by the New York State Education Department Reading First Office. The Board offered congratulations for quality curriculum development, program advancement and strengthening of early grades literacy development at Peru CSD.
- C. Applauded the nine Peru CSD delegates to the 56th annual Harvard Model United Nations session, featuring some 3,000 students from twenty-one states and nineteen nations. Peru CSD represented the Czech Republic. These students, along with faculty advisors Deborah Daly, Peter McCormick and Fran Mitchell, representing our school district very well, indeed.
- D. Expressed appreciation to the many faculty members, support staff members and administrators who assisted Peru CSD and the information technology network support team in a major cross-campus shutdown of computer workstations during the two-week holiday recess period. The planned shutdown was successful on many fronts, and Peru CSD continues to learn from such experiences. The next cross-campus shutdown is slated for the upcoming long weekend commemorating the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. from end of classes on Friday, January 16th through start of classes on Tuesday, January 20, 2009.
- E. Received an update on the purposed 5000 section [students] recommended by the NYSSBA and 'fine tuned' to better reflect current Peru CSD policy, as part of the school district's first comprehensive updating of the district policy manual since 1991. The Superintendent of Schools intends to solicit constituent feedback on the NYSSBA's proposed 5000 section this month.
- F. Awarded tenure appointments to teacher Amanda Coupal, teacher Shawn Sexton and teaching assistant Rachel Romanowicz.



JANUARY 15, 2009

FROM A. PAUL SCOTT, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

- G. Examined the January 2009 State of the District report.
- H. Adopted the proposed added language for the Interscholastic Athletic Handbook, as recommended fall 2008, regarding matters when a student wishes to try out for an athletics team within two weeks of the season's start.
- I. Engaged in a preliminary discussion regarding the recent request from math department faculty member Lin Chen regarding a prospective February or April 2010 field trip to China for senior class members of the class of 2010 who are enrolled that school year in Advanced Placement Calculus.
- J. Awarded the Block Purchase and Removal of Additional Surplus Items remaining from the July 12, 2008 publicly advertised surplus sale to Earth Waste Systems in the amount of \$251.

The January 2009 Superintendent's Report to the Board of Education is attached.

The third annual State of the District Report will be available via the Peru CSD Web site by mid-day on Friday, January 16, 2009.

JANUARY 15, 2009


FROM A. PAUL SCOTT, SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

EASTBOUND AND DOWN

Jerry Reed [Hubbard], was born in 1937 and died this past September. Reed was one of only three performers ever given the title of 'certified guitar player' by the legendary Chet Atkins. Reed considered himself much more a songwriter than a singer or player. It's my understanding that prior to the 1977 release of the film 'Smokey and the Bandit', Jerry Reed's hit single from that movie had been focused on the continuous improvement efforts of progressive public school systems. The focus was the road to success for America's students, with the highway as a metaphor. Perhaps these were his original lyrics:

East bound and down, eighteen wheels are rollin',
we're gonna do what they say can't be done.
We've got a long way to go and a short time to get there.
Success for all is what we will have won.

Earlier this decade, Peru CSD students, faculty, administrators, the Board of Education, support operations staff and volunteers did what many thought could not be done: Measurably boost student achievement at Peru CSD during a time of fiscal adversity in our local community, when federal impact aid to Peru CSD associated with the Air Base ended, state aid was diminished due to an economic downturn, and it was necessary to re-boot, re-energize and collaboratively do what it took to advance student success and professional practice, even while our campus infrastructure was under construction. That was 2001. Let's fast-forward to 2009:

Commissioner Mills visited our community on the evening of January 8, 2009 at Crickets Restaurant, as the featured speaker and guest of honor for the combined Clinton and Essex Counties School Boards Association meeting. Earlier this school year, Mills pointed out to BOCES Superintendent Craig King that our portion of the North Country is among the areas where student graduation rates in the 80% range are measurably higher than the statewide rate in the upper 60's. On the evening of January 8th, Mills listened as much as he spoke. He listened to students and former students from Beekmantown CSD, Northern Adirondack CSD, Peru CSD, Plattsburgh CSD, Ticonderoga CSD and elsewhere. They spoke of teachers who 'just wouldn't let them give up' and of school programs such as ninth grade academies and 'structured study halls' and 'working lunches' where you eat your lunch in the supportive company of a teacher who helps you finish that homework assignment or lab assignment. They spoke of coaches, programs and the extraordinary efforts of teachers and Principals working 'above and beyond' with students to bolster student success and prevent student dropouts. They spoke about caring educators who set conditions for 'staying the course' and graduating, rather than dropping out.

Also that evening, Commissioner Mills challenged this Eastern-most region of the North Country to be the first 'beacon' for New York State: Become the first region with 90% graduation rate. He challenged us to do this by four years from now. Well, once again, we've a got long way to go and a short time to get there. Once again, we'll set out in collaborative fashion on a mission some say can't be done.

The mission: Measurably increase graduation rates even higher at Peru CSD, building on the strengthened professional practice and cross-campus tradecraft we've collaboratively put together in recent years, and do so even as we 'weather the storm' of fiscal adversity, diminished state aid and the years 2010 and 2011 construction phase of our EXCEL capital project which will more fully modernize our classroom spaces and help make our consolidated central campus more energy efficient.

The challenge from Commissioner Mills is substantial yet is consistent with the Peru CSD mission, with our new district goals, and with our 2007-2012 strategic performance objectives. Success for all is the mission – Mills has called for 90% graduation rate by four years from now. Tonight, we celebrate our successes this decade, and we launch the next phase of 'good work' ahead. Eastbound and down.

STATE OF THE DISTRICT 2009

The third annual Peru CSD **State of the District Report** is slated for Board examination and discussion tonight. You are invited to identify any segment of the report that 'caught your eye'. This annual report provides the Board of Education and district stakeholders with facts and perspectives on the status of the school district's programs and support operations at the start of this new calendar year. In addition, the report identifies:

- ☑ Some of the notable accomplishments of students, faculty, support staff, administrators, operations supervisors, the Board of Education and other Peru CSD volunteers in recent years associated with continuous improvement and accomplishment of district goals;
- ☑ Forecasted priorities and challenges for the next eighteen months;
- ☑ Pertinent information to assist the school board with construction of a proposed 2009-2010 school year spending plan, subject to voter consideration in May of 2009.

GOVERNOR'S EXECUTIVE BUDGET CALLS FOR 2009-2010 STATE AID CUTS

Governor Paterson's budget proposal for 2009-2010 was presented to the Legislature on December 16th, one month ahead of schedule. His budget proposal includes reductions across every area of state spending, in response to a \$1.7B current year budget shortfall, and a \$13.7B deficit for 2009-2010. Paterson said the financial services industry is in the midst of an unprecedented crisis, resulting in the need for New York State to fundamentally reevaluate what the Empire State can afford to spend. He intends for the Empire State to 'tighten its belt and limit spending to what we can afford'.

The tentative figures regarding the impact of the Governor's Executive Budget on public education programs and services at Peru Central suggest Peru CSD faces a \$1.1M deficit reduction assessment, which nets out to be an approximately \$312,000 reduction in state aid for 2009-2010, after factoring various other state aid figures. The 2009-2010 budget development process is well underway. At this point, it is evident that:

- A. Budgeting for 2009-2010 will be challenging, given a net cut in state aid;
- B. Peru CSD will need to continue every cost reduction and energy reduction strategy currently in practice and Peru CSD will expand cost reduction strategies winter and spring 2009, to better position our school district for the state aid cut we face;
- C. The forecasted budget development factors approved by the school board last month are reflected within the early January 2009 published reports on the economic downturn;
- D. Administration will work closely with the Board of Education to establish a responsible budget plan for next school year, while keeping in mind we need to think in a multi-year financial frame of mind, since this severe economic downturn is multi-year in nature.
- E. The conservative approach to budgeting, revenues and expenditures which has become customary at Peru CSD will serve the community well in the months and years ahead.
- F. The Peru CSD multi-year approach to financial planning will serve the community well, too.

As is standard practice, each and every employee request for expenditure of district funds related to supplies, materials, conference, travel and equipment receives suitable consideration. Employees and supervisors have been very courteous and understanding this semester, regarding the need for extraordinary conservation of available funds to help Peru CSD sustain programs, operations and positions into next school year and the school year beyond that.

While there's not a total 'freeze' on expenditures, there is a heightened level of close examination with each and every staff request for expenditure of district funds. Such close examination reflects the substantial economic downturn and prospective cut in state aid slated to take effect July 1st.

NYSSBA RESPONSE TO GOVERNOR'S JANUARY 7TH STATE OF THE STATE

Wednesday afternoon last week, Governor Paterson provided his State of the State speech. He stated that "The only way to restore our long-term economic competitiveness is to build the world's greatest system of education." The NYSSBA response to his speech included the suggestion we cannot escape the fact that building a world-class education system requires having a great teacher in the classroom, a strong leadership team in every district and, yes, financial resources. NYSSBA asserts that at the very least, the state must hold school districts harmless in next year's state budget, with no cuts from current-year funding levels. The NYSSBA stated we should not make our children the brunt of those "horrible economic choices" the Governor referenced in his speech.

The NYSSBA applauded the Governor's call for relief from burdensome state mandates, though the NYSSBA continues to have serious concerns about imposing a tax cap at a time when the governor has proposed dramatic cuts in state aid to education. NYSSBA forecasts such a move would leave schools with no alternative but to drastically cut programs and people. That would undoubtedly impact students, and the opportunities provided for them in our public schools. The NYSSBA agrees with the governor's assertion that we need to spend money wisely. The NYSSBA recently issued a report with fifty-five recommendations intended to reduce costs over the longer term. Many of these recommendations would require some action by state lawmakers.

The NYSSBA made note of the Governor's statement that he stands ready to work with state lawmakers to ensure that 'the road to economic competitiveness and renewal runs right through our schools'.

PRESS REPUBLICAN EDITORIAL FOCUSES ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY AUDITS

The Press Republican's editorial of January 4th focused on the prospective benefits from an avalanche of school audits that followed some shady dealings by school personnel on Long Island. Such public accountability audits can help all school districts, according to the Press-Republican.

In one district, two school officials were convicted of bilking the taxpayers out of \$11 million. Upon the resolution of this case, State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli ordered audits of all public schools and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services in the state. He gave auditors until March 31, 2010, to complete them all. His office has wrapped up 548 school audits since 2005 and has about 200 more under way. All of the rest will begin by next June, his office has announced.

The Press Republican stated that audits have been completed on several districts in this area and they have been very useful. Generally, except in the few extreme cases in which malfeasance or gross negligence emerges, audits point out areas where better practices can be employed or more vigilance instituted. Those have been the cases in the local audits. The newspaper suggested that mostly, the audits have shown a need for better controls over extra-curricular funds, more reliable bookkeeping procedures and more exclusive selection of personnel with computer access. These are not violations of anything except best practices. They don't point to a need for prosecution of individuals — just more conscientiousness or better education on how to conduct daily business. Findings on audits rarely indicate bad people. Statewide, the audits have shown three fundamental mistakes in school procedures:

► Inappropriate payments to school officials when they leave a district (in 7 percent of the audits) or for personal services that they are not entitled to in their contracts (16 percent). Audits found a number of school-district attorneys receiving retirement benefits, though they aren't employees of the district and

are not, therefore, entitled to them. As workers under contract, they do not qualify for pensions. This was not found to apply in any of the districts in the North Country.

- ▶ Deficiencies in the claims audit process to ensure expenses are appropriate (36 percent).
- ▶ Weaknesses in the security of the districts' IT systems (44 percent).

Any of the deficiencies uncovered by audits in this region should be deemed as helpful to the overall efficiency of the district. If money involved in the conduct of extra-curricular activities is not receiving appropriate attention, it only helps the district, the activities and the taxpayers to have that pointed out. The Press-Republican suggests no one should overreact to a negative audit, but no one should ignore it, either. The editorial expressed appreciation for the conscientious application of resources toward the project by DiNapoli and his office. This is a beneficial use for the efforts of the comptroller.

PERU CSD INTERNAL CURRICULUM AUDIT PROCESS MOVING AHEAD

During winter and spring of 2007, the district office collaborated with the faculty association and administrators to craft a set of criteria for the Peru CSD internal curriculum audit process. Those criteria and the internal curriculum audit process itself were piloted during the 2007-2008 school year. This school year features the fall 2008 semester audits of social studies in grades 7 & 8, and in grades 9 & 10. Those two internal curriculum audit reports are slated for publication in the weeks ahead. The curriculum audit teams and their audit reports will be featured at the February 2009 monthly meeting.

I commend the more than fifty faculty members who have engaged with the piloting and launch of this progressive step forward to bolster curriculum, learning and instruction at Peru CSD. Curriculum audit team members this semester include Bruce Beauharnois, Holley Christiansen, Deborah Daly, Mark Hamilton, Kathy Lawliss and Peter McCormick. Holley Christiansen's designation as fall 2008 senior auditor reflects her key role this semester, and her ongoing engagement with this curriculum auditing initiative since winter of 2007. I continue to serve as facilitator for all curriculum audit teams at Peru CSD, and intend to do so next school year, providing consistency of focus and process.

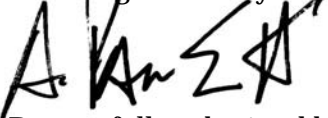
An internal audit of selected elementary grades social studies programs is slated for spring 2009.

BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO PRESENT RECOMMENDATIONS FEBRUARY 3RD

Last week, the budget advisory committee launched its extensive examination of the New York State School Boards Association ad-hoc task force report on maximizing school district resources. That report provides fifty-five recommendations for cost reduction and streamlining.

Given the scope of the economic downturn and the close relationship between New York State tax revenue and the hard-hit financial services sector headquartered in New York City, it's likely we will see dynamic discussion and longer-term decisions resulting from the fiscal adversity forecasted for the Empire State and for those school districts like Peru CSD which receive a majority of their revenue from state aid.

The budget advisory committee will present its recommendations to you February 3rd.



Respectfully submitted by A. Paul Scott, Superintendent of Schools