Opportunities Await Waterford Students

The beginning of a new school year brings new opportunities and heightens excitement for the year ahead. On Tuesday, September 6th, 2700 students will arrive at Waterford’s five schools and begin their educational journey for 2011-2012. Over the past few weeks, staff have been setting up their classrooms and preparing for the return of our students.

The incoming Kindergarten class will be the class of 2024. We, collectively as a school system, are committed to ensure that all students are prepared to meet the challenges of the world, now, and in the future. Futurists remind us that 80% of the jobs for this incoming class have yet to be created, and 90% of the technology our 2024 graduates will use has yet to be invented. Our success as a district is directly connected to strong parental support and involvement, a talented, dedicated faculty and staff, and a system of continuous improvement that permeates all aspects of our work. It will take all of us, including community support, to collaborate in a meaningful way to continue our tradition of excellence.

I am frequently asked, “What do you do during the summer?” Summertime is used to reflect on and review the previous year and pro-actively plan for the upcoming year. I’d like to highlight a few of the many accomplishments of the summer. Throughout the weeks of July and August, important work occurs in our school system. Our commitment to the continuous improvement of teaching and learning led to many important summer projects such as curriculum renewal, technology upgrades and installation, curriculum writing and valuable professional development opportunities.

Our World Language curriculum was formally renewed and adopted by the Board of Education in June and will be implemented utilizing new resources this coming school year. This summer, a team of 19 math educators met to begin the renewal process for mathematics instruction. In order to deliver the highest quality instructional programs for our students, it is critical to have a curriculum that is rigorous, current, and very tightly aligned with state and national standards. Common assessments and performance tasks provide us with valuable information regarding student progress and accomplishments. Over the course of the new school year, our staff will participate in augmenting current programs and developing assessments to more closely align with these curriculum standards and 21st Century demands.

The recruitment and selection of new staff continued throughout the summer. Two teachers have been hired along with a new Principal for Clark Lane Middle School, a Special Services Director and a new Director of Finance and Operations. Our district webpage features a photo display and profile of each new staff member. The value of highly qualified teachers and administrators is indisputable, and we continue to hire the “best” for the Waterford Public Schools.

It has also been an extremely busy and productive summer for the facilities staff. They have worked diligently cleaning all of the buildings, inside and out, conducting many repairs along with ensuring that each of the major projects, planned for the summer, were accomplished. Preventative maintenance on all of our emergency systems at each of the schools was performed to ensure that they are ready if needed. All emergency generators, fire alarm systems, sprinkler systems, emergency battery lights and all fire extinguishers have been tested.

The most visible summer project is the new construction taking place at Waterford High School. In July, the School Building Committee agreed to expand the scope of work to include
extensive renovations to the pool, field house, and old gym so that any alterations to the existing facility will be upgraded to renovate “as new”, extending the life of those facilities and potentially increasing the state reimbursement rate to the town. As you drive by the Waterford High School campus, you will note the significant changes to the site. First and foremost, steel has been erected giving shape to the new construction. The new building should be closed by winter so that the interior work can commence soon after the holidays. Forty wells have been dug for the geothermal heating field. The loop road is ready for paving and the new football field is taking shape. All of the asbestos abatement has been completed.

Quaker Hill Elementary School has been awarded the prestigious LEED Certified status established by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) and verified by the Green Building Certification Institute. (GBCI). Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) is the nation’s preeminent program for the design, construction and operation of high performing green buildings. Quaker Hill Elementary School achieved LEED certification for energy use, lighting, water and materials use as well as incorporating a variety of sustainable strategies. By using less water and energy for heating and cooling, a LEED certified building saves money for families, businesses and taxpayers. Every aspect of the new structure, from floor to ceiling, has a high-tech, low-maintenance, green concept. The windows are the new gas-filled, low-energy type. Energy use has been further reduced by increasing insulation and glazing. Lighting is sensor-driven, motion-activated and depending on how bright it is outside, the lights are self-adjusting, which cuts down on electrical use. The heating and air-conditioning systems are geothermal, drawing warmth from deep in the ground during winter and transferring heat from the building back into the ground during summer. Quaker Hill Elementary School is the first public school in Connecticut to earn certification under the LEED for Schools 2.0 rating system. (Click here to read the full press release.)

Our student transportation bus routes have been revised and I want to assure all parents and students that our buses are safe to drive and our contractor, First Student, is here to serve you. Parents are reminded to contact the school administration whenever their child encounters a problem riding the bus and to inform Mr. Ron Melnik, Director of Finance and Operations, whenever there is an issue with a bus driver or other bus company employee.

Growing up I marveled at the grace and skill with which Willie Mays played the professional game of baseball. He once said, “If you want a season of a lifetime, prepare for it.” I believe the Waterford Public Schools are poised for a great 2011-12 school year due to the dedication, commitment, skill of our staff and the support of our parents and the Waterford community.

As we begin this new school year, all of us in the Waterford Public Schools are committed to providing the best educational experiences to meet the needs of our students and prepare them for the 21st Century demands. We are a school district dedicated to continuous improvement, and your continued support and generosity are greatly appreciated. New opportunities await our students and we are ready, excited, and anticipate a great 2011-2012 school year!

Jerome R. Belair
Superintendent of Schools