

PORT WASHINGTON Union Free School District

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December 21, 2011

Dear Students, Staff and Community,

As we approach the height of the holiday season, I want to take a moment to wish all of you the most wonderful and special holiday season possible. In these difficult times, we still have much to be thankful for, and please note that I will focus this letter on the positives for which we all can be and/or are thankful.

First, our students continue a record-setting achievement staircase that bodes very well for the future of Port Washington. We now have four consecutive years of record National Merit Scholars, yet another year of nearly 100% graduation rivaling the top high schools on Long Island, and special accomplishments in the arts, athletics and volunteerism that establish our school system as among the top in the country. In my long experience in education, I have never seen students more on task or caring about each other. That said, we know that there are pressures on students today; in many cases, from the frontier of the Internet. All of us together must look carefully at issues like bullying, alcohol and drug abuse and teenage depression as we continue to look at the bright futures that our children deserve. There are many traps for students, and alcohol and drug abuse remain the scourge of our society.

Second, while we continue to face extremely difficult budget challenges, we have been able to maintain our educational model of reasonable class size at the elementary school, numerous gifted programs encompassing so many students and academic intervention programs that support the most at-risk students. For example, our Regents diploma rate for classified students has soared from 17% in 2002, when we began our partnership, to an average of 72% over the past several years reaching as high as 80% last year. That is significantly higher than the New York State average Regents diploma rate for General Ed students, so our hard work together has continued to result in positive outcomes for students throughout the educational spectrum. This will be our most difficult budget year yet, but I am optimistic that together we can continue to carefully build the excellence of our students and schools.

Third, I am extremely pleased with our home-school partnership. From our voluntary Board of Education to our voluntary parent leadership groups, our home-school partnership is thriving. Ditto for the school component as our teachers, principals and staff continue to reach out with voluntary extra help, individual Web pages and positive communications with students and parents. We look toward continued growth and progress as our home-school model strives and serves as a beacon for other school districts.

In summary, the challenges remain formidable and public education is at a pivotal crossroad between the past and the future. My own vision of student excellence in academics, the arts, athletics and volunteerism remains steadfast and optimistic. While our children may and will stumble at times, make no mistake that I believe the best is yet to come. Together, as a community, we can look to continued prudent initiatives, like the Mandarin that we added to our World Language curriculum this year, and to provide all students constructive opportunities in an increasing global environment.

It remains my privilege to be your Superintendent and play a small role as we continue the upward momentum for our students and community. Please do not be discouraged, but rather take this wonderful holiday time to be thankful for the gifts that are ours in this wonderful community and school district.

Best Regards,



Geoffrey N. Gordon, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools