

FROM YOUR SUPERINTENDENT - JANUARY 2009

"The strength of the United States is not the gold at Fort Knox or the weapons of mass destruction that we have, but the sum total of the education and the character of our people."

Claiborne Pell

Without a doubt, 2009 promises to be an interesting year. There is much anticipation building for the new presidential administration, and the tasks to be tackled seem to grow more daunting by the week. And now, following the elections at all government levels, everyone begins to focus on how all those campaign promises made in the fall will be paid for in the future. However, this year's tough times are unprecedented, and since more than 20% of New York State's revenue comes from Wall Street, the state has its work cut out for it. But when Governor Paterson presented his budget for next year, he, like governors before him, loaded the fiscal woes of Albany onto the backs of Long Island taxpayers. Little if anything has been proposed to fix the root of the real problems.

As I've noted many times before, the funding system for education is broken, and its inadequacies are causing direct harm to the taxpayers and communities of Long Island.

First, Albany continues to ignore the major cost of living differences between Long Island and upstate communities. Everything costs more on Long Island. Whether it is spent on utilities, food, goods and services, or labor, a dollar on Long Island buys about 67 cents of what an upstate dollar can purchase.

Second, while Long Island educates about 17% of the state's students, it receives less than 13% of the available state aid. Simply put, Long Island tax dollars are subsidizing upstate schools, requiring Long Island property owners to pay considerably higher real estate taxes to make up the difference here at home.

What to do about it? Well, as much as we continue to lobby our cause in Albany--and that should not stop, ever--we are constantly looking for ways to reinvent ourselves and what we do. Administrators in South Huntington continually meet with staff to look for ways to make it better. It can be anything from energy conservation to textbook selection to extracting even more benefit from already-successful programs. It is everything we do. Whatever it is, we scrutinize it, we figure out how to improve it, and we continually look for ways to work smarter.

Over the past several months we have been looking very carefully at all budgetary areas under our control (and at some that aren't) and asking hard questions about their efficiency and their benefits for our students. Our goal is to continue to provide all services necessary to meet the needs of the children in our community while still keeping costs and property tax increases to a minimum.

Consequently, while we ring in the New Year with a fresh dose of optimism, we continue our vigilance, and we invite you to be involved. Whatever might be happening in Washington, or in Albany, you can impact what happens here in South Huntington. Your involvement in the education of our children is vital. You do have a say. I urge you to participate.

I wish you all a safe and happy new year.

Sincerely,
Tom Shea
Superintendent of Schools