

A Message from the Holmdel Township Board of Education

One summer while I was in college, I worked as a janitor in a local elementary school. Spending eight hours a day scrubbing desks and scraping off dried bubble gum offered vivid evidence that a school district stays busy even during the hazy days of summer.

Summer is a time for taking stock, anticipating challenges, and setting goals to ensure our school district continues to provide one of the best public educational systems in the country. It's a time when the Board of Education and the school administration collectively sweat out the details about the coming school year, in part because we turned down the air conditioning to save on costs.

I guess we can afford a little humor, but sadly not much else. Every indication suggests that next year's budget will require all of us to consider difficult choices, and so setting goals is particularly important right now. School districts have an obligation to make sure that everyone in their communities knows where they stand and why.

Over the last few months, many people have framed the discussion about public education in New Jersey around dollars and cents, but shouldn't we also consider the issue of **dollars and sense**? Here's what I mean.

During a recent Monmouth County School Boards Association workshop on educational leadership during difficult times, the main speaker, Dr. Gerald Woehr, offered a provocative point—public education should not be viewed as an expense, but as an investment.

Dr. Woehr's comment raises an interesting challenge. The burden of proof falls on the Board of Education to demonstrate we are indeed spending taxpayer money wisely. We recognize that the resources of the district are limited, but we also believe a commitment to excellence represents a better value than an acceptance of mediocrity.

Good schools mean we are preparing our children to succeed in a competitive world. Good schools mean we can recruit the best educators available to ensure a continuum of excellence across generations of students. And good schools mean higher property values, because they attract people who want to live here and are willing to pay top dollar to do so.

As a new school board member you find your idealism confronted by reality on a regular basis, and I admire the veterans on the board who retain enthusiasm and confidence in the face of multiple challenges—from budget cuts to staff reductions to changes in administration. That's why goals are so important; they provide focus when distractions abound.

As a board, we approve two sets of goals. Our first set of goals, the district goals, guides our administration, establishes priorities, and offers the community something tangible to judge. We established five district goals last year, and will probably end up with the same number this year, too. These goals will align closely with our mission statement—a 63-word paragraph that sums up our commitment to excellence.

The mission of the Holmdel Township Public Schools is to provide a comprehensive and caring educational environment that will develop the potential of every student into achievement. In partnership with our community, the School District will support all of our student's efforts to meet and exceed the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, and to become responsible and resourceful citizens and life-long learners.

I think special attention should be given to the phrase “in partnership with our community.” We're not saying in partnership with *the parents* of the Holmdel, but with all residents, because building and sustaining a superior school district is a ‘team sport.’ Good school districts work hard to get as many active participants as possible.

Our second set of goals guides the actions and aspirations of the Board itself. While they

reaffirm our commitment to the district's goals, they also continually challenge us to consider ways to improve the way we govern—by keeping the lines of communications open, by striving to consider diverse opinions, and by encouraging everyone in the community to become involved.

We expect both sets of goals to be posted on our Holmdel District web site by the time the new school year begins in September.

One of the fascinating aspects of the recent World Cup tournament was how so many teams worked so hard with so much coordination just to score one goal. And usually that one goal was the margin of victory. Our goals will require a lot of work, too, and while we won't have vuvuzela horns to urge us on, we will have the benefit of a solid corps of dedicated volunteers and community activists who want us to score, too.

Have you considered making a commitment to the school district a personal goal for you in 2010-11? It is certainly easy to do so. Come to a school board meeting or participate in an event sponsored by a parent-teacher organization. Talk to your children's teachers and volunteer in the classroom. Support the many athletic or artistic activities sponsored by our schools. A good first step is to subscribe to "E-Alert" for our informative series of email alerts through the district web site, which will keep you up-to-date with what's happening throughout the year.

In the meantime, here's a goal for everyone to embrace—have a wonderful and safe summer!

On behalf of our Board colleagues,

Mike Sockol, Board Member

There are two easy ways to stay informed of the district/schools happenings. Please visit the district website at www.holmdelschools.org for event updates, school announcements, district progress reports, board meeting information, and much more. You can also subscribe to our E-Alert at <http://www.holmdel.k12.nj.us/home/joinlist.shtm> to receive email alerts of your choice of topics, such as school security alerts, committee notes, parents supporting group minutes, the district calendar, career opportunities, and school lunch menus.