



Dear Colleagues,

I take this opportunity to thank you, our teachers, staff, and administrators for your support in providing the best education for our children.

February offers an opportunity to reflect on our journey since the opening of school, and to look ahead and establish priorities and goals for the rest of the 2009-2010 school year and for the coming year.

As we continue to focus on our most important mission, student achievement and success, we are fortunate this school year to have several opportunities to work together to achieve our vision. We seek a high-quality education for every student and to make certain that each and every one of our schools attain its annual measurable objective. With this in mind, I want to tell you about a few of initiatives that are in progress.

Thank you for your support.

Patricia Watkins, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Failure Is Not an Option

In September all building-level administrators were trained in the Failure Is Not an Option model. They were instructed to follow the same protocol with their staff and to develop steps for implementation by December for February.

This process is the beginning of the development of a professional leaning community. It is based on more than a decade of research on high-performing schools.

The overriding philosophy of the Failure Is Not an Option model is the critical role that every teacher, professional administrator, and staff member provides to support each child in our schools.

An organization does not become a learning community overnight; our school district is working hard to put the

principles into practice through a bond study process, discussion groups, and workshop speakers.

The six principles of Failure Is Not an Option are:

1. Common mission, vision, values, and goals
2. Ensuring achievement for all students by developing systems of prevention and intervention
3. Collaborative teaming focused on teaching and learning
4. Using data to guide decision making and continuous improvement
5. Gaining active engagement from family and community
6. Building sustainable leadership capacity



Hempstead Pre-K students participate in a celebration of Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Instructional Leadership

“In many instances we identified best practices in Failure Is Not an Option that have been employed here at Barack Obama Elementary and that have contributed to the success of our learning community. However, we recognize that this is not enough. We cannot rest upon our strengths, but must clearly acknowledge our areas of weakness and collaboratively initiate steps toward change.”

Ms. Jean Bligen
*Principal
Barack Obama
Elementary School*

The Process

“Our Leadership Team decided that the staff would read chapter five of ‘Failure Is Not an Option’ and use it as a guide for developing the school mission and vision statement. We reviewed, discussed and summarized that chapter. We brainstormed expectations for our programs, students and ourselves. We compared and contrasted; we revised and edited. All staff members were involved in the process, and our new mission statement was written.”

Mrs. Grace Gonzalez-Alfaro
*Principal
Hempstead Pre-K*



Barack Obama Elementary School students visit Village Hall to participate in a 50th anniversary commemoration of the Greensboro sit-ins.

Benchmark Assessments

In January, the school district implemented Benchmark assessment in all content areas. This process was developed in collaboration with the K-12 content directors, curriculum coaches, and teachers. Below is an explanation of Benchmark assessments in the district; however, building principals will be able to explain this initiative in more detail and answer any additional questions.

What is a Benchmark Assessment?

- Benchmark assessments are standards-based assessments administered at regular intervals to monitor students’ growth, to guide instruction, and to identify individual students’ needs for re-teaching and intervention.

Benefits of Benchmark Assessments

- They are short tests administered throughout the school year that give teachers immediate feedback on how

students are meeting academic standards.

- They help teachers target instructional practices to meet specific students’ needs and monitor students’ progress.
- They yield descriptive data — not judgments. They are used diagnostically and to improve instruction.
- They are used to adjust instruction to better meet the needs of the students who are assessed.

Why the Need for Benchmark Assessments?

- They improve learning outcomes for all students by using the process of data analysis.
- They promote effectiveness by adapting new instructional practices and adjusting current practices.
- They link the elements of the instructional process, including instruction and content standards.

Strategic Planning Process

In order for our school district to move forward, we need to have a plan for the future. Several months ago, we started the conversation about the district strategic plan with the district’s administrators. We followed up with two community forums where members of the community expressed their vision for the school district.

Six priorities have been identified, and we have asked all building administrators and

Central Office Administration to join a committee.

It is imperative that principals and assistant principals join a committee because we need the collaboration and involvement of faculty and staff members, which we expect to take place through the leadership of the building administrators. Currently, we are working with the Board of Education to refine the goals and priorities set by the community.

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Promoting High-Performing Schools

- Targeting and addressing priorities
- Maintaining high expectations for all: students, staff and parents
- Gaining courage to evoke positive change
- Increasing parental and community involvement within the school
- Sharing of ideas and best practices (research-based)
- Correctly using data to inform and drive instructional practices

Ms. Regina Armstrong
*Principal
Fulton School*

Principles of 'Failure Is Not an Option'

- Common mission values, vision, and goals
- Systems for prevention
- Collaborating teaming for teaching and learning
- Data-driven decision making and continuous improvement
- Active engagement from family and community
- Building sustainable leadership capacity

Mr. Richard Brown
*Principal
Early Childhood Center*



Principal Richard Brown celebrates Martin Luther King Jr. Day with students from the Early Childhood Center.

Promethean Board used to improve instruction

On January 21, a Promethean Board presentation was made to the Board of Education and stakeholders attending the board meeting. As we move to enhance and improve instruction, we are trying to find other ways to actively energize student learning in the classrooms. One way to do so is through Promethean Boards.

What is a Promethean Board?

The Promethean Board is an interactive whiteboard that uses groundbreaking technology to promote learning. The ability

to project large images and the engagement resulting from interacting directly with the media have the potential to improve instructional practices. The boards are kinesthetic, visual and with the addition of speakers even auditory.

These activity boards encourage active student participation in learning activities. For instance, learning how to tell time or make change becomes more intriguing when students use the electronic manipulative of time and money.

Welcome New Administrators

Please join me in welcoming Mr. Jeff Fabre, Administrator for Security and Mr. Peter Cavassa, Administrator for Facilities. They started their new positions on January 27.

School Calendar Committee

I would like to thank and congratulate the members of the school district calendar committee for their time and commitment in presenting the 2010-2011 calendar recommendations to the superintendent. This committee was facilitated by Ms. Retha Bell, Mr. Julius Brown, Mr. Richard Brown, Ms. Janice Gedeon, Ms. Suyapa Gonzalez, Ms. Sharon Johnson, Ms. Phyllis Leff, and Mrs. Anna Ullmann.

High School Restructuring of the School Day Committee

To provide students with the greatest opportunity for learning, several members of the high school staff, with the support of the Center for Secondary School Redesign, have been meeting to find ways to better utilize the instructional day.

I would like to thank and congratulate the following staff members for their commitment and support to teaching and learning: Ms. Barbara Intrieri, Ms. Carol Rodriguez, Mr. Benjamin Coleman, Ms. Hillary Light, Ms. Karen Rose, Ms. Susan McPhee, Mr. Terrence Chapman, Ms. Linda Bessellieu, Ms. Larissa Cosenza, Ms. Jalila Givens, and Ms. Dawn Sherwood.

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Future Plans

“As we move forward, we will continue to reflect upon our work as professionals, acknowledging that creating and sustaining a professional learning community is dependent upon us honestly assessing where we are, where we want to go, and what we need to do to get there. Failure In Not an Option has given us the blueprint.”

Ms. Jean Bligen
*Principal
Barack Obama
Elementary School*

“Failure In Not an Option will provide a direction to drive the Early Childhood Center towards an effective school-wide plan.”

Mr. Richard Brown
*Principal
Early Childhood Center*



Jackson Main Elementary School fifth-grade students participate in a clothing drive for two Hempstead families that lost everything due to a fire.

Classroom Walkthroughs

I would like to congratulate the high school and middle school teachers who participated in the Teacher Classroom Walkthrough on December 17 and 18, 2009. The following high school teachers participated: Ms. Korin Scarles, Ms. Dawn Sherwood, Ms. Phyllis Taylor, Ms. Dagoberto Echeverria, Ms. Naome Robinson, Ms. Juanita Anderson, Ms. Waju Akiwowo, and Ms. Joelle Day. The following middle school teachers participated: Mr. Brian Kennedy, Ms. Donna Miller, Ms. Patricia Williams, Mr. Elias Mestizo, Ms. Desiree Uzzell, Ms. Elizabeth Swiatkowski, Ms. Sue Langto, and Ms. Dawn Sumner.

The Teacher Classroom Walkthrough improves teaching and learning by enabling teachers to get the best sense of what students are doing in a different and holistic way. The protocol works because it is based on teachers' own questions about students' learning — building on their desires to become better teachers. Effective instruction methods are learned through discussions about individual teaching experiences.



Mrs. Sharon Austin, a third-grade teacher at Jackson Main Elementary School, congratulates a student for reading 12 books by the end of December.

New Format for the AIS and Regents Preparation Program

The Academic Intervention Services in the elementary schools is being implemented with the support of Education Link. Education Link is a technology instruction program that assists students and teachers in the delivery of academic content. This program has been well received by the elementary teachers and principals.

The Regents Preparation Program at the high school is being implemented with the support of Castle Learning. This program is a data-based assessment and an instructional tool to support diagnostic assessments of students.

The Insider is produced exclusively for the employees of the Hempstead Union Free School District.

Hempstead Union Free School District
185 Peninsula Boulevard, Hempstead,
NY 11550 (516) 292-7111