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SUPERINTENDENT'S CORNER

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Dear Staff, Families and Lowellians,

Welcome back! By all accounts the opening of school has gone smoothly with just a few bumps here and there. I would like to acknowledge our staff and the School Committee for being responsive to the many questions, concerns and inquiries that is associated with 14,000 students returning to our schools. It takes a community of support to do the job well – thanks to all. Students and staff are now settled and focused on the school work that needs to be done.

On August 31st we had a Kick-Off for our 2,200 employees at the Lowell Memorial Auditorium. We thank our friends at the Auditorium for the hospitality they showed us – we appreciate their support. This event was an opportunity for our entire workforce to come together and hear the collective vision that informs the management philosophy of how we are going to work in order to obtain our goal of all students working at proficient and advanced levels. Our Mission Statement is:

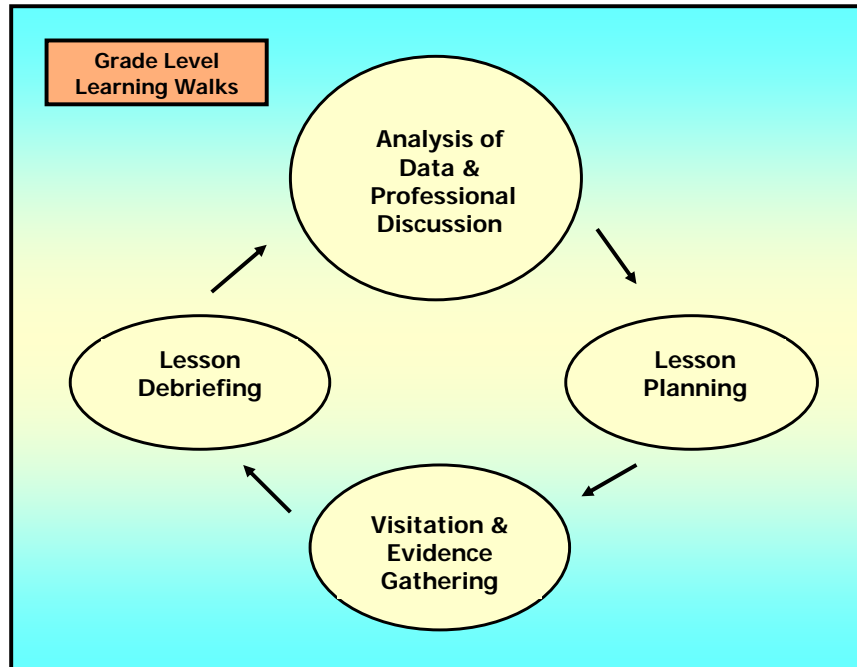
In the best interest of our students, we will build a mutually respectful and authentically collaborative culture, rooted in open and inclusive decision-making and shared leadership.

I am proud to state that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education evaluated the work that has been done on our school reform initiatives in the district last year and has great “confidence” in the work that is being done and the direction we are going in. To quote the evaluation entitled: “District Plan for School Intervention Review” (June 2009):

“There is evidence that the three priority district plans for school intervention initiatives have been implemented in the Lowell Public Schools and continue to be a focus in the district. Under the new administration, modifications to previous implementations are in

process. The district is revising the formal learning walk process to increase teacher involvement and empowerment.”

In other words, the way we do business at Lowell Public Schools has changed. Professional learning communities of teachers, school-based administrators, district staff and staff from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education are all coming together by grade level to examine the student data to determine the areas that need improvement for individual students and the most effective instructional strategy that should be employed. Below is the cycle of grade level learning walks that both the administration and the United Teachers of Lowell have embraced in an attempt to make our Mission Statement, as seen above, operational.



This graphic oversimplifies the complexity of the work being done but hopefully provides a big picture overview so that the community-at-large can better understand that what we are teaching has not changed but the way we operate has. Our teachers and administrators are hopeful that through the establishment of strong professional learning communities in all of our schools we will be able to actualize our goals of excellence.

The MCAS scores for the 2008-2009 school year were released this week. Paul Schlichtman, Coordinator, Research Testing & Assessment, has determined that:

Throughout the system, our students continue to show progress on the MCAS. We are moving students out of the Warning and Failing categories and into the Proficient and Advanced categories in all grades. Our efforts to improve middle school mathematics instruction produced big dividends, and we made significant gains at Lowell High. For example, our most significant gains, compared to last year's results, include a 10 point increase in the percentage of students scoring above Proficient in sixth grade math, an 11 point increase in the percentage of students scoring above Proficient in tenth grade math, and a 12 point increase in the percentage of students scoring above Proficient in tenth grade English Language Arts.

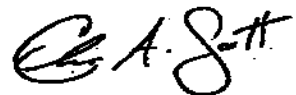
It is my understanding that Lowell High will be featured in the Boston Globe on Sunday for out performing many other urban high schools on the tenth grade MCAS Science test. In addition, this is the first year that Lowell High School made Adequate Yearly Progress [AYP] for all subgroups in Math. I would like to congratulate staff and students, district wide, for their continued effort and commitment as these scores clearly indicate we are moving in the right direction.

On another very positive note Lowell Public Schools has officially lowered its drop-out rate to 2.4% compared to the State average of 3.4%. This impressive statistic has garnered attention from many in the field. There are numerous contributing factors to this success ranging from a very effective Freshman Academy to our partnerships with the Lowell Police Department and OneLowell, just to name a few. Also many formalized systems have been put into place at the high school to ensure that our students not only come to school every day but are actively engaged in scholastic and extra curricular activities. At Lowell Public Schools we strongly believe that students need to be offered many opportunities to develop their strengths and conquer their weaknesses; and in so doing, they will be proudly engaged in their academic journeys. Our low dropout rate informs us that this belief is fully operational.

Just a reminder, the United States Census 2010 Campaign has begun. It is important for all of our families to be “counted” as it directly impacts the federal funds we receive here in Lowell and the number of congressional seats allocated to the State. A decrease in census numbers for the City of Lowell and the Merrimack Valley Region could result in a loss of representation in Washington and a decrease of Federal Funding. Although Census Questionnaires do not have to be filled out until April 2010, I am bringing it to your attention now as there will be various mailings on this matter sent out to your homes from the federal and local governments. Please educate yourself on this issue as your participation is very important.

As we are building capacity premised upon our collaborative management philosophy, I have heard many staff members state “it is an exciting time” at Lowell Public Schools. It’s true we are gaining momentum, as made evident in the details of this newsletter. Please contact me at any time – I am here to ensure that your children receive an excellent education.

My best to you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. A. Smith". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.