

*Promise me you'll always remember: You're braver than you believe,
and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.*

Christopher Robin to Pooh (by A. A. Milne)

Hard to believe I am sending out a December Newsletter - it seems like we were singing on opening day with Lorretta Lacroche a few short weeks ago. After all these years in education I am still amazed how fast the year move by. As 2015 comes to end, I would like to thank our out-going School Committee members: Maria Doucette, Kevin Cassucci, Peter Ciciolini, and Adam Weldai for their years of support and advocacy for the Malden Public Schools. These members have been important people in my development as superintendent. With their departure we have the opportunity to welcome four new members to the School Committee, so please join me in welcoming Emmanuel Marsh, Tara Murphy Beardsley, Catherine Bordonaro, and Mike Drummey to the committee. I have had the opportunity to meet and spend some time with these new members, and I looking forward to working with them in the future.

As we depart from 2015 we also find ourselves leaving No Child Left Behind (NCLB) as a framework for our educational policy. Moving forward we will look to the reauthorizing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) to guide educational policy in the future. Other educational changes include the PARCC exam, which will be with us one more year as we prepare for the new, more rigorous, next generation of MCAS. We have witnessed a more relaxed Department of Education focus with regards to linking evaluation to certification, a new stance on allowing DDM flexibility, and the extension of the 'hold harmless' status for two more years. In my opinion, it seems the focus on mandates and compliance issues is beginning to shift. 2016 will be an interesting year for education as both federal and state influences seem to be loosening their hold on educational policy.

While many federal and state educational factors seem to be trending on a positive track for educators, there are other factors that will impact our schools and classrooms in a different way. Poverty continues to grow in our country at a steady rate. Each year we are seeing higher trends in families needing more economic support as they struggle to just to meet their basic needs. Cities like Malden feel the impact of tough economic times first hand, and many of our families are working hard to make ends meet at the end of the month. With these tough economic times also comes a higher rate of homelessness for our families. There has been an increase in our students and families finding themselves moving into shelter sites, hotel rooms, and 'doubling up' with friends and family due to a loss of housing. Before the holiday break Central Office witnessed an increase in the number of homeless families entering our district. Many of these families are in need of supports that reach well beyond the academics we provide.

2015 brought to the forefront a state struggling with an opiate addiction which has reached an epidemic level. With the rise in addiction numbers also comes an acknowledgement of the damage it is doing to individuals and families, not only in the state, but also in our individual communities. Addiction knows no boundaries, it touches all aspects of society, and no one subgroup has sole rights on addiction. Drug addiction transcends economic status, race, educational level, and zip-codes. While addictions come in many forms, there is one constant factor of all addictions - they take a toll on the individual and all those they touch.

As we move into 2016 as educators we find ourselves in the middle of social issues, which we have no control over, but must deal with on a daily basis. On a daily basis we are dealing with the real issues plaguing families and children which many of our politicians gloss over. We see the impacts of poverty, drug addiction, homelessness, and economic instability every day. We see families in crisis, an increase in social emotional issues in younger children, and the impacts of tight fiscal budgets making our jobs more difficult each year. As we move forward in 2016, public education must be a priority to city, state, and federal leaders. We can't do this alone.

Public education has been the great equalizer in our society from its onset. Historically, in these public schools, administrators and teachers have played the role of 'significant others' for many students, and provided support for multiple families. As educators, we walk a fine line between supporting students and not enabling them. We must guide students to the right choices, but resist the urge to lead them there. We should have empathy for their situations, but not allow sympathy to lower our expectations for our students. We need to meet our students where they are as they enter our classrooms, and recognize that the 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' approach may not work for all them. When you think about what is being asked of us it's daunting.

To summarize, our job is not an easy one, but it is an important one. We teach the mind, develop the heart, and mentor the soul. We are consistency in chaos, we are support when none is nearby, we are encouragement when life is overwhelming, and this is what makes us educators. Long after the content we teach our students is gone, they will remember the acts of kindness, the words of encouragement, and the relationships we developed with them. We influence and shape lives, and there is no greater or important job.

I wish you all a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Dave