

Welcome Back 2009

This morning, I want to talk with you about three very important things. First, I'm sure you already know that this is going to be a very challenging year between the difficult economy causing budget problems across our Island, the overall reduction in support for schools by the Commonwealth and the upcoming negotiations with all five of our bargaining units. To make matters worse, one of our oldest traditions – the Island Cup football game - is in jeopardy as well. As a result, we are all going to have to work together and go the extra mile if our 2100 students – yes each and every one of them - are to have we a quality

educational program. Sometimes reality just jumps out and bites you and this is one of those times.

Second, I want to re-assure you that we have been working with the town health agents, the Mass Dept of Public Health and other island medical professionals to prepare for any potential outbreak of the H1N1 flu. Your school nurses have been meeting with the other Island medical folks since last spring and even spent a day off-island two weeks ago getting the most up-to-date information. Each building will convene a small “task force” to plan locally and we will coordinate these efforts island-wide. We will have a ton of information sheets to go home and to post on the web. I want to encourage you in particular to follow the advice of the Dept of Public Health with regard to this possible flu outbreak. If you think you have flu-like symptoms which

according to the DPH include a fever of 100.4 or more for a 24 hour period and a cough or sore throat, then STAY HOME. Also, let's make a concerted effort to encourage everyone to wash their hands. The DPH believes that hand washing is probably the most important thing we can do to keep the flu at bay.

Finally, I want to talk a little about an instructional focus for the year. Over the summer, our Cabinet read a book by the National Association of Elementary School Principals entitled "Leading Learning Communities" and it emphasized the need to shift our main thrust from teaching to learning. To quote the authors, "Principals must manage organizational learning and performance in a way that emphasizes that learning for **students and adults** is the central function of the school." It goes on to say that the

most important measure of our success is what our students actually learn and not what the teacher may have taught or what scores students may have received on tests like the MCAS. In order to emphasize this shift, we need to do more than collect data about our students. We must turn that data into information about student learning – all types of information – test results, demonstrations, performances and reflections and then use that information to structure what we ask students to know and be able to do. These efforts need to be planned, ongoing and systematic and we must work smarter – in a collaborative manner as part of a group or a team. One way to help us make this shift is by having professional educators like all of you participate in the professional learning communities (PLC's) which began last year. These PLC's must target the results of

student learning and must be interdependent, with common goals holding each participant mutually accountable.

We will also need to continue our work on improving mathematics achievement across all grades to prepare our graduates for whatever comes after high school and we need to emphasize more and better student writing of all kinds. Our graduates continually come back and tell us that they were not adequately prepared for their writing assignments in college.

I firmly believe that you can and will make the difference for every individual student in the MVPS. Recently, I heard President Obama tell a poem by Roselind Johnson about starfish and an old man and I have told that story myself a bunch of times. It goes like this –

As the old man walked the beach at dawn,

He noticed a young person

Ahead of him picking up starfish and

Flinging them into the sea.

Finally catching up he asked why

The youth was doing this

The answer was that the starfish

Would die if left until the morning sun.

“But the beach goes on for miles and

There are millions of starfish,”

Countered the old man.

“How can your effort

Make any difference?”

The youngster looked at the starfish in his hand and

Then threw it

To the safety of the waves.

“It makes a difference to this one.”

Let’s all continue to make that difference to at least one student each and every day.

Thanks for all you do.