

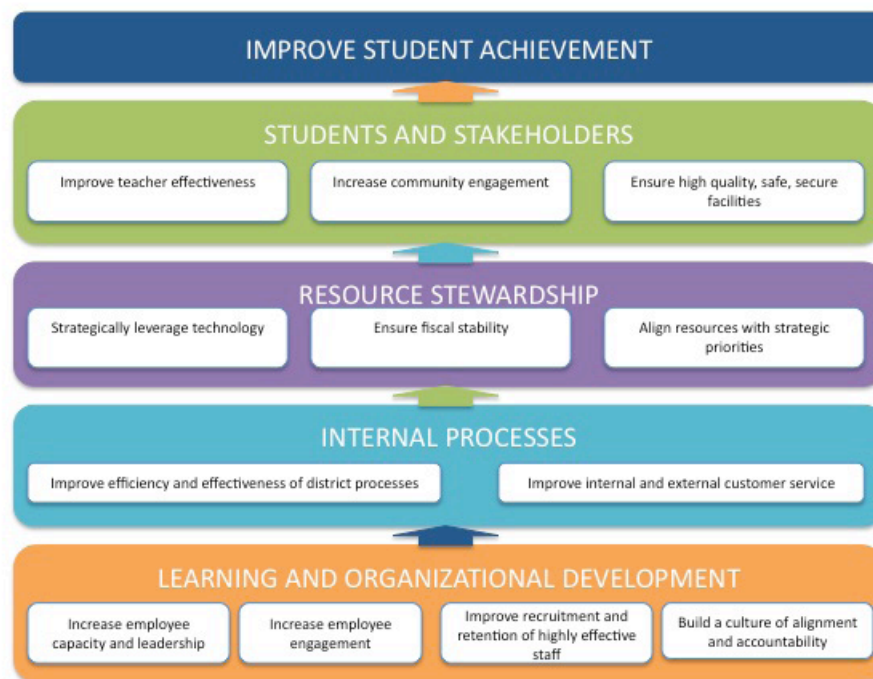
Dr. Rath's Comments State of the District Report February, 2010

Good evening, Board of Education and Community Members. Each February, I present a "State of the District" report to you with an overview of our goals, progress, programs and advances for the current school year. This evening, I am here to report that our schools have given us many reasons to be proud in 2009.

First, it's important for us to look at the framework of our system. Our over-arching goal continues to be student achievement. We are committed to the district mission of preparing "all children to be successful citizens and workers in the 21st-Century".

Mount Laurel Public Schools 2009-2010 Strategy Map

Mission: To prepare all children to be successful citizens and workers in the 21st Century. As aligned with the 2004 revised New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, this includes educating students to read with comprehension, write clearly, compute accurately, think critically, reason, discover, innovate, collaborate, and use information to solve problems.



As you can see in this chart, our work begins at the level of Organizational Development. It's not enough to simply hire the best people for the job. Once they are hired, we must make certain that they understand how our professional, school and district goals align

and are used to gauge accountability at each level. We have to be sure that our staff members are part of the important conversations taking place at all levels on program, methodology and accountability. And, they must believe that their contributions are valued, and valuable.

To that end, our Professional Learning Communities and School Professional Development Committees have been formed at the building level, and our use of internal experts for professional development increased. Our employees have been engaged through the formation of a Kindergarten Committee, the Professional Learning Communities, the District Technology Plan Committee and the new curricula developed by committees last summer.

Our recruitment of highly qualified personnel has been augmented this year by the ability to search statewide education job sites by title and by our posting of all administrative positions with professional organizations across the state.

This year, with no new positions added to our budget, we hired 16 certified staff members, 18 non-certified staff and two new administrators. Our newest principal was hired from within our ranks. Our new teachers underwent four days of orientation before the school year began to discuss Mount Laurel's culture of alignment and accountability.

Our district administrators, likewise, met during August for a three day-retreat and Fierce Conversation training. We focused on building and district goals, new programs for the year and an in-depth analysis of student achievement for the previous year.

All of those conversations and our current goals played a role in our Internal Processes as we began the school year. We have equipped administrators with the appropriate tools to use test data to inform instruction, both from our Measures of Academic Progress and the state Assessment of Skills and Knowledge tests. Harrington Middle School's Unified Plan has been developed collaboratively and addresses the specific needs of those students who have not reached proficiency levels on standardized tests.

Bolstered by the popularity of PowerSchool and Lunchbox, the electronic systems that keep parents connected with our schools twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, we launched the district's online television station – What We See TV! in November. Our families can now share in video productions from our school anytime and anywhere. We have also begun live-streaming school events on the channel that families can watch in real time on their work or home computer.

With an emphasis on customer service, we conducted training for all school secretaries and have implemented many of their suggestions to better serve parents in gathering and retaining critical student demographic information. Our website continues to expand, and our presence on Facebook and Twitter serves the segment of our population seeking news on a more constant basis in an abbreviated format.

We continue to place a very high priority on our role as stewards of the public's contribution to its schools. The 2009-2010 annual school budget did not include a tax increase, but we have worked within those confines to maintain student services and retain low class sizes. Together with staff, we have strategically leveraged technology by creating a new three-year district technology plan and using American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds to equip classrooms with ActivBoards and sound-magnifying systems for special education students.

Aligning resources to our strategic priorities, we moved to an online Math textbook for all students in Grades 1-6 and completed our goal of using online text for Science in all grades across the district. We continue to support the expansion of classroom independent reading libraries as part of our Language Arts curriculum.

Throughout the year, we have monitored our facilities and performed routine maintenance projects. It is crucial that we protect the public's investment in its schools now and into the future. To that end, we have undertaken a number of ecological or "green" endeavors. We have increased our participation in recycling efforts and have retrofit our lighting systems to be more energy efficient.

We are currently in the final planning stages of a proposal for solar energy at both Hartford and Harrington Schools that will come before the board for a determination very soon. Not only will solar energy save money on the upkeep of our facilities, but it will also be incorporated into our educational program by sharing real-life energy data with our students.

Ensuring fiscal stability is a challenging, but ever-important role. As we have seen with the Governor's budget message within the past week, we are never able to take our annual budget for granted. All efforts are made throughout the year to reassess and reevaluate the needs of the district based on current conditions. We seek out and engage in every opportunity for shared services that might mutually benefit our schools and other governmental agencies. And we diligently prepare for all possible eventualities. Many of our cooperative ventures have allowed us to increase efficiency as well as save funds.

In the 2009-2010 school year, our students and stakeholders have been well served by the Mount Laurel Schools. Our staff members arrived three days before the year officially began for students and underwent intense training in new strategies and programs. Teacher effectiveness continues to improve through lesson units written by collaborative groups and ongoing training in Reader's and Writer's Workshop and Math Success Net.

Our Parent-Teacher Organizations have worked in partnership with principals and staff to provide rich experiences that augment program and unite the community. Our Parent University series this year featured renowned author and child expert Dr. Michael Bradley, and two valuable sessions by John Kriger on how to motivate minds and protect children from current trends in drug use. Two sessions remain this spring on the use of Social Networking the Internet as a source for Educational Resources. Across the district, parents have been brought into the classroom via Voicethread, an interactive means of sharing student work.

The district's important security program has been supported by cooperation with local police and emergency agencies and the addition of security cameras at our Hartford and Harrington Schools.

This year, Mount Laurel was the first school district in the county to host in-school vaccination clinics for the H1N1 Flu, which threatened epidemic outcomes if left untreated.

In terms of educating the whole child, there has been a tremendous emphasis on community service this year, from our holiday food collection that feeds more than 140 families twice each year to our contributions to Ronald McDonald House and the South Jersey Food Bank. Staff members and students were very quick to respond to the tragedy in Haiti with fund-raising efforts that are still ongoing in all of our schools.

Each of the factors I have mentioned has been a part of the whole resulting in improved student achievement in the 2009-2010 school year.

Evidence is the 493 students who are enrolled in accelerated, compacted or advanced Math this year. That's 15-percent of our entire population in Grades 2-8. This year, we have 119 more students enrolled in the Advanced Math this year than last year. Enrollment in Algebra and Geometry for high school credit has grown significantly, with a full 28-percent of our eighth-grade students able to graduate this year with high school credit. Nearly a third of our seventh-graders are taking some form of Advanced Math and will also enter Lenape Regional High School with Math credits.

Our ASK test results demonstrate student success in Grades 3-8 in Math and Language Arts as compared to our District Factor Group. While it is traditional to compare test results against the state average, it is significant to see how we rank against comparable schools within our district factor group I.

The charts that follow show that in both Language Arts and Mathematics, and in all grades, Mount Laurel students test scores were closely aligned with other schools within our District Factor Group, and well above the state average. Certainly, this is an area where we strive for consistent annual progress, but this comparison is encouraging and offers validation that our efforts are moving us in the right direction.

To summarize, Madame President and Board Members, the State of the District in 2009-2010 is exceptional. Certainly, there are challenges ahead economically. And there are no doubt advantages we would like to provide that may be limited by funds or governmental mandates. But today, I report that we are fortunate to find ourselves in a community which supports its public schools at every turn, where parents are concerned and involved, staff is engaged and prepared, and students come ready to learn each day.