

REPORT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

To the Inhabitants of the Town of Abington:

I am pleased to submit my fifteenth annual report as your Superintendent of Schools. Once again, it has been a busy and productive year for the Abington Public School District.

Education Reform and School Improvement

Our school district's improvement efforts continue to be driven by the many mandates and high standards established by the landmark Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993. In particular, the annual development of individual school improvement plans, the K-12 review and update of curriculum in all disciplines and its alignment to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, the establishment of high performance standards for teaching and administrative personnel and the administration of nine cycles of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment Test (MCAS) have all contributed to improved teaching and learning.

At the federal level, No Child Left Behind, the 2002 elementary and secondary education law, calls for increased accountability through annual student, school and district assessments; distribution of district and school report cards and expectations that all teachers are "highly qualified."

School councils in each of our six schools continue to make progress in achieving the goals contained in their school improvement plans. These goals continue to focus on promoting learning environments which are academically challenging, supportive, attractive and safe for both students and staff. Highlights of the 2006-2007 plans include: a high school focus on implementing instructional strategies to improve reading comprehension and writing skills in all areas; the promotion of the best possible teaching strategies and practices grounded in the principles, standards and performance indicators for middle level educators at the Frolio Middle School; and at the elementary level, improved student performance and achievement in mathematics and English Language Arts. A special thanks to school council members for their time and service to our district.

The Education Reform Act of 1993 mandated the development of Curriculum Frameworks for seven discipline areas. Those disciplines are Mathematics, Science and Technology/Engineering, History and Social Science, English Language Arts, World Languages, the Arts and Health. These frameworks articulate a vision of learning, teaching and student assessment in each discipline, as well as learning standards that outline the specifics of what Massachusetts students are expected to know and be able to do at the various levels of their schooling. These documents continue to be used to provide direction to the ongoing curriculum revision being conducted by local curriculum study and writing teams in conjunction with Abington's Cycle II Five-Year Curriculum Review and Update Plan. During the 2006-2007 school year, curriculum efforts are focused on the review and update of curriculum in English Language Arts (PreK-6), Science and Engineering/ Technology (3-12), History and Social Science (PreK-2).

In 2001 the Massachusetts Department of Education issued technology benchmark standards for all school districts to meet by the year 2003. These benchmark standards clearly define what PreK-12 students should know and be able to do in order to use technology for learning. The standards also prescribe the type and amount of technology our students should have access to in classrooms, libraries and computer laboratory settings. The

\$106,680.00 appropriated at the November 13, 2006 Abington Special Town Meeting for our school district's Technology Plan has provided badly needed funds to replace outdated computers and software in the Frolio Middle School's library media laboratory (30) the Center Elementary School (30) and the North Elementary School (30). The students and staff are grateful to the citizens of Abington for their support in this area.

These remain busy, challenging and exciting times for education in Massachusetts and Abington. Successful implementation of the provisions of the Education Reform Act of 1993, No Child Left Behind and local initiatives related to Abington's Vision 2008 Goals and our Five-Year Curriculum Review and Update and Technology Plans continue to require not only the attention and assistance of the entire school community but also appropriate levels of financial support. However, an annual per pupil expenditure which continues to lag far behind both the statewide average and averages expended by communities with similar economic and demographic profiles as Abington coupled with the many challenges presented to students and teachers as the result of the use of out-dated school facilities hinder efforts to meet our school district's mission of "providing all students with challenging educational experiences necessary to reach their potential and become informed, responsible citizens."

Personnel Changes

As a result of a large number of retirements and a number of resignations, the beginning of a new school year in August 2006 brought with it the hiring of over forty (40) new employees in the Abington Public Schools.

There are three important changes to the administrative staff for the 2006-2007 school year. Mrs. Nancy Moran retired as the Principal of the Woodsdale Elementary School after many years of dedicated service to the students and staff of the Abington Public Schools. Mrs. Sharon Bellao, a former Assistant Principal in Whitman, is the new Principal at the Woodsdale Elementary School. Mr. Jonathan Bourn, a former history and social science teacher in Brockton, is the new Assistant Principal at Abington High School. Mr. Michael DeGrosso, a familiar face in Abington, has replaced Mr. Jeffrey Kent as the Athletic Director for the Abington Public Schools.

Staff Induction and Professional Development

Over the summer months 60 faculty and staff were involved in a variety of curriculum development projects. For example, two dozen elementary teachers participated in a workshop to develop grants and assessments for our new Every Day Math Program, five teachers worked on writing new history and social science curriculum at grades 4 and 5 and two high school teachers were involved in designing a curriculum for a course in statistics. Abington's first year teachers participated in North River Collaborative's Beginning Teacher/Mentoring Program and Writing Across the Curriculum Workshops. In addition, a large number of staff members participated in graduate courses this past year.

A separate orientation day for new teachers was held on Thursday, August 24, 2006. The traditional back-to-school program for all faculty, tutors and paraprofessionals was held on Monday, August 28, 2006.

Major professional development initiatives for the 2006-2007 school year include: implementation of the recently adopted elementary Every Day Mathematics Program, cur-

riculum development and assessment. Mandated professional development includes specific training in: Civil Rights, SPED Regulations, Accommodations in Diverse Learning Needs, prevention of discrimination and harassment, English Language Learners, Title One, IDEA 2004, physical restraint, mandated reporting and 51A's.

Abington Education Foundation

The Abington Education Foundation (AEF) once again had a very active and successful year. The Foundation's main goal is to encourage, promote and sponsor educational experiences and learning opportunities for students and teachers in the Abington Public Schools. The Foundation, in conjunction with the Jeffrey Coombs Memorial Fund, awarded over \$20,000.00 in mini-grants for the 2006-2007 school year and sponsored its ninth annual golf tournament on June 12, 2006 at the Ridder Country Club.

Assessment and Accountability

In the spring of 2006, all public schools in Massachusetts administered the ninth round of examinations under the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). To comply with No Child Left Behind requirements, 2006 was the first year Massachusetts tested all students in grades 3-8 and 10 in both ELA/Reading and Mathematics. New ELA tests were added in grades 5, 6 and 8 and new Math tests were added in grades 3, 5 and 7. The total number of tests administered was up from ten (10) in 2005 to sixteen (16) in 2006.

Statewide tenth graders made striking advances on the 2006 MCAS exams. An unprecedented 84% of students in the class of 2008 earned their competency determination by passing both the ELA and Math exams on their first try in 2006. Abington's tenth graders scored significantly higher in both ELA and Math than their peers statewide, and 94% of Abington students in the Class of 2008 earned their competency determination in both ELA and Math.

Across the state, student performance on 2006 MCAS tests at grades 3-8 was flat and in some cases declined from previous years. Of special concern is the decline in performance in Grade 3 Reading. This is the second year in a row that performance in grades 3-8 showed little or no improvement.

Abington's grades 3-7 2006 MCAS scores likewise were flat and in some cases declined. However, grade 8 results in Abington were significantly better than the statewide results at grade 8. Clearly, we need to focus our attention on why this plateauing/decline in student performance on grade 3-7 MCAS is occurring, and then proceed quickly to develop and implement both short-term and long-range strategies to reverse this trend.

As a result of our student performance on MCAS in 2006, our school district in the aggregate earned a high performance rating in English Language Arts and a moderate performance rating in mathematics for the Cycle IV Adequate Yearly Progress requirements established by state and federal agencies under No Child Left Behind. Unfortunately, as a district we did not make Adequate Yearly Progress in the special education subgroup for both English Language Arts and mathematics. Statewide, 234 school districts did not receive AYP determinations in 2006.

Based on test results from the ninth administration of the MCAS, we have identified our areas of strengths and weaknesses. We continue to implement specific programs at all levels to improve student performance in the areas of greatest weakness and to insure

compliance by 2014 with the national goal set forth in the No Child Left Behind Act. The goal is that all students and every subgroup will achieve proficiency in English Language Arts and Mathematics. This goal can only be achieved by maintaining a highly qualified staff, establishing reasonable class sizes, offering targeted assistance to low performing students and reaching adequate levels of funding.

A review of SAT scores for Abington students shows that in 2006 84% (up from 70% in 2005) of our high school seniors took the SAT. Even with this increase in participation, Abington students fell within our normal range of standardized testing for the SAT's.

In late February 2006, the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) issued a final report on its October 2005 Coordinated Program Review of our school district's compliance in Special Education, Civil Rights, Title I, Safe and Drug Free Schools and English Language Learners. Overall, the report was favorable. However, we are required to submit a Corrective Action Plan in response to 29 standards rated as "partially implemented" within the lengthy report. The DOE expects that all areas cited will be completely implemented within a year of the acceptance of the Corrective Action Plan by DOE.

Student Achievement and Activities

Once again, through the dedicated efforts of our very capable staff of teachers, administrators and support personnel, our students continue to be successful as exemplified by the following educational indicators:

- Post Secondary Education and Placements - Higher education placement for the Class of 2006 found approximately 89% of the graduates furthering their education with 63% going on to four year colleges and 26% to two year colleges or technical schools. Seven percent (7%) of the graduates planned to go directly to work and 4% planned to enter the military.
- Student Accomplishments - Several students received prestigious academic awards and scholarships from national, regional, state and local organizations. Matthew Mitchell received a Rensselaer Medal for Excellence in Science and Mathematics and Michelle Eckland earned the Bausch and Lomb Excellence in Science Award. Rebecca Keohane was awarded the D.A.R. Good Citizenship Award. Scholastic Art Awards were given to James Hall, Emily Parsons, Kaileen Powers and Alexander Temple. Nicole Corbett, Rebecca D'Attilio, Matthew Mitchell and Matthew Cotton all earned awards at the South Shore Regional Science Fair. Nicole Corbett, Rebecca D'Attilio and Matthew Mitchell attended the MIT State Science Fair. Nicole Corbett was a delegate to the International Science Fair in Indianapolis, Indiana. The Grace L. Arnold Award for Academic and Athletic Performance was awarded to Cathy Greenough, and Matthew MacLean was the recipient of the W. Percy Arnold Award. Thirty-eight students were awarded the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship, which provides a tuition waiver for four years of undergraduate education at Massachusetts state colleges and universities. The Adams Scholarship is based on outstanding performance on MCAS.
- National Honor Society - Twenty-three Abington High School students were inducted into the Abington Chapter of the National Honor Society in December 2006.
- Frolio Junior High School - Sean Nickley and Erin Hollander received Commonwealth of Massachusetts Middle Level Educators' Student Scholar Awards.

The above examples coupled with a high level of involvement and success in extracurricular and co-curricular activities continue to be a source of great pride for the whole community.

Facility and Technology Improvements

Although funding for capital projects continued to be limited in 2006, progress was made on our Capital and Technology Plans. All gymnasiums across the district have new, brighter and energy efficient lighting. The heating systems and ventilation units in each of our school buildings were cleaned and adjusted to provide maximum comfort, healthy air flow and efficiency.

School building improvements included completion of a number of projects. At the Early Childhood Center, a new roof was installed and several classrooms have new ceilings, electrical upgrades and counter tops to shelve new computers. The driveway and turnaround areas at the Woodsdale School were repaved. At the North School, fence and parking lot repairs have been completed. The classroom closets at the Center School have had hooks installed for student back packs. At the Frolio Middle School, new carpeting was installed and the trim outside the building was painted. At Abington High School, the two underground oil tanks were removed, the fire doors repaired and the cafeteria and kitchen ceilings painted.

Relative to technology, servers were purchased and installed in the Center, North and Woodsdale Schools and in the Early Childhood Center. This work completed our network for all K-12 faculty, staff and administration. All classroom computers across the district were re-imaged and provided with software and security updates. Also, major repairs were made to the computer lab in room 313 at the high school. All of these measures provide for the best possible computer speeds, reliability and efficiency across our school district.

Closing Comments

I wish to acknowledge with deep gratitude the continued good work of school groups such as PTOs, the Greenwave Athletic Boosters and Music Parents' Association, the Abington Education Foundation and other community service organizations, local businesses and other town departments for their many contributions to the public schools.

I would like to express my appreciation to my administrative team, the PK-12 faculty and all support personnel for their assistance and dedicated service. They labor each day, sometimes under pressures and limitations, to meet the needs of their students. They continue to work hard to implement the mandates of the Education Reform Act of 1993 and No Child Left Behind.

In closing I wish to publicly thank the present members of the Abington School Committee for their continued support, and I look forward to working with the Committee in the new year as we attempt to address the many important and sometimes difficult challenges facing public education.

Respectfully submitted,

John J. Aherne, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools