



Notes from the Desk of the Superintendent

The month of February focused almost entirely on finalizing plans to restructure several schools for the 2009-2010 year and communicating with staff, parents, and the community about a special meeting of the Board of Education in late February to hear the results of the Cambridge Education quality review of our district and schools.

This is all a lot to absorb, and I will do my best to explain why we need to make changes and how these changes will benefit the children attending Ansonia Public Schools.

The State Department of Education sets benchmarks, or goals, for each school district to achieve when students in Grades 3-8 take the Connecticut Mastery Tests every spring. While most of our students have scored well enough to meet the benchmarks, there are groups of students who have not. This has resulted in Mead and Ansonia Middle School being listed as schools "in need of improvement" for four or more years.

We were contacted by the State last summer that they would be sending a team of state and national experts into our school district during the 2008-09 school year in order to help ALL of our students. The State hired Cambridge Education of England, who have worked around the world in school districts that want to improve. Cambridge sent two experts into Ansonia in November and December, and their written report on what we do well and what we need to do better was made public on Feb. 25, 2009.

About 100 people attended this special Board of Education meeting, which featured as the main speaker Deb Richards, head of the State Department of Education Bureau of Accountability. She explained the changes that have taken place in Connecticut during the past two years, and why Ansonia is one of 15 school districts in Connecticut that is getting help in making changes.

Ms. Richards also explained that because Ansonia receives Title I funds, which are federal grant dollars, it must make further changes during the 2009-2010 year. Those changes involve restructuring several of Ansonia's

schools: Mead and Prendergast will house children in Grades K-6; Ansonia Middle will house students in Grades 7 and 8; and Ansonia High will remain the same, although the Alternative Education Program will move to the high school next year. The Prendergast Pre-K program will be relocated into a wing of the middle school.

We have posted the results of the Cambridge Quality Review on our website: www.ansoniamiddle.org. We will schedule additional meetings in each school building to allow parents, staff, and the community to ask questions about the proposed restructuring of the schools next year. Information will be coming to all of you through our website and additional communications. I have met with the teacher's union and with the PTOs to discuss the restructuring. I am in the process of scheduling meetings with the tutors, aides, and custodial staff. Kathie Gabrielson, our special education director, has met with the principals and her special education staff regarding the reconfiguration of special education. If anyone has any immediate concerns, please e-mail me at cmerlone@ansoniamiddle.org or call me at 736-5095.

Other activities this month included:

* I attended the Feb. 13 Martin Luther King Brotherhood Awards, which honored the contributions of several local residents: John Gentile and Bruce Goldson.

* During the week of February 23, I met with each school principal to review their walk throughs and discuss their recommendations for teachers needing support, based on formal and informal teacher observations and evaluations. We are continually looking for patterns of effective teaching strategies in our classrooms so we can share them with other teachers.

* A press conference announcing the formation of a Human Relations Club at Ansonia Middle School was held on Feb. 25. It was very well attended, and we are impressed with the enthusiasm from students and staff.

Sincerely,

Carol Merlone
Ansonia Superintendent
of Schools