



Community Newsletter

Rush-Henrietta
Rush-Henrietta Central School District

Fall 2004

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Parent Satisfaction on the Rise

Parents are increasingly involved in their child's education and pleased with local schools, according to results from the 2004 Partnership Schools Survey. Results were shared with more than 100 school administrators, teachers and parents who attended the comprehensive forum to review levels of parent satisfaction.

The annual Partnership Schools Survey seeks ways to maximize parental involvement and enhance student achievement, two goals that often go hand in hand. "Parents need to feel welcomed in our schools, and we encourage them to partner with us in their child's education," says Superintendent Dr. J. Kenneth Graham Jr.

There is plenty of good news to share. On 27 of the 40 survey questions, at least 80 percent of parents gave their child's school positive marks. During the forum, parents, teachers and administrators addressed the 13 questions that ranked lower. In small groups, they examined data and tried to glean insights from parental responses.

"What are other school districts doing that we should consider in Rush-Henrietta?" Graham asked. "Are there practices in our elementary schools that we should be implementing on the middle and high school levels? Can we do better in terms of reaching out to parents and explaining opportunities for them to get involved in their child's education?"

One group discussed whether "our schools help students set academic goals, select courses

and plan for college," and made several recommendations on how to encourage parental input regarding class choices and college planning.

Another group suggested that middle school staff make stronger efforts to establish personal connections with students. "The more we can personalize this, the more we can connect with the students and their parents," says Mark Turner, principal of Sherman Elementary School.

On 18 of the 40 survey questions, there was significant improvement when compared to the previous year, meaning that positive response improved by at least three percent. Among those improvements: 85 percent of respondents agree that their child's school recognizes and celebrates student academic success, and 88 percent agree that the child's teacher and the school staff demonstrates that they care about the child.

District leaders encourage parents to complete and return the survey when it is distributed next spring. Between 2003 and 2004, there was a 16 percent increase in the number of parents who completed and returned the survey, from 1,821 to 2,119. "We can take a lot of pride in the larger response rate," says Dr. Kenneth Hilton, executive director of research and evaluation, speaking on behalf of the district. "The better the parent response, the more useful the data. And the more we can improve to the benefit of the students."



From the Board

Dear Community Residents:

On behalf of the Board of Education, it is my pleasure to let you know that the 2004-2005 school year is off to a smooth start. Efforts are well underway to implement improvement initiatives that support student success.

As you know, the Board of Education consists of seven volunteer members elected by the Rush-Henrietta community. The board generally meets twice a month to discuss and review the direction and performance of the school district. Each board member also serves on several district committees as a part of their board responsibilities, as liaisons to school and parent groups, and as liaisons to the town councils of Henrietta, Rush, Brighton and Pittsford.

Additionally, board members serve on committees of the New York State School Boards Association, the Monroe County School Boards Association and the Genesee Valley School Board Institute for Staff Development. Each of these organizations brings school board members together to discuss a variety of topics aimed at effective board and school district performance.

It is my pleasure to serve as the president of the board and to work alongside such a committed group of people. Board members routinely volunteer 15 to 20 hours of service each week to the school district in addition to balancing their family and work responsibilities. Among the members of the board you will find a wide range of experiences, educational backgrounds and ideas about effective school district management.

While we embrace and value the diversity of backgrounds and ideas, we share a vision, along with the superintendent, of success for increased student achievement. Our focus is to create a school district where student achievement is supported by outstanding instruction, quality support services, exemplary facilities and safe, caring, learning environments. I hope that you share the pride that each of us has for Rush-Henrietta and will work in whatever way possible to help us achieve our vision of student achievement.

Sincerely,

Edward A. Lincoln

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District Forms Diversity Advisory Council

In an effort to help the district better understand the diversity of its student body and how this diversity impacts student learning, a Diversity Advisory Council [DAC] has been established. Community residents, along with other stakeholders, are invited to be part of this important group that will advise the superintendent of schools on actions that can be taken to improve districtwide understanding of human diversity, its impact on student learning and recommend school and district practices that promote an appreciation of human diversity. These recommendations will focus on the areas of curriculum and instruction, student management and support, parent involvement, professional development and workforce diversity. It is expected that these efforts will help to improve student achievement and mitigate achievement gaps.

It's remarkable how closely the Rush-Henrietta school community mirrors the diversity of our nation. The rich multiculturalism of Rush-Henrietta reflects America's racial and ethnic diversity. Today about 76% of Rush-Henrietta students are white, 13% African American, 7% Asian American, 3% Hispanic and almost 1% Native American. Almost 3% of our students live in homes where English is the second language.

Clearly, the district is proud of its diversity and, at the same time, thankful for it. But we also recognize its challenges. Foremost of these is the existence of learning achievement gaps . . . gaps defined by race, gender and socioeconomic status, and gaps between the achievement potential and reality of all of our students. In almost every academic area and at all grade levels, our girls outperform our boys. In almost every academic area and at all grade levels, our Asian American students outperform all other racial/ethnic groups, and many of our African American, Hispanic and Native American students perform far below their abilities. And in too many academic areas, our student body, as a whole, fails to achieve on common learning assessments among the top public schools serving similar student populations. These learning achievement gaps cannot be tolerated and student failure, by any group of Rush-Henrietta students, is simply unacceptable.

To ensure broad representation of our school-community on this council, each of the district's nine schools will be represented by staff and parents, along with the Board of

Education, school and central administration, key parent groups, students, alumni, community residents and faith communities.

Once established, the council will be asked to examine its own makeup to ensure that it reflects the diversity of the Rush-Henrietta school community. If necessary, it will seek additional members.

The DAC will meet monthly, on the 3rd Tuesday of each month. Additional meetings and workshops will be scheduled as needed. During its first year of operation, the superintendent of schools will chair this council and in subsequent years, will appoint co-facilitators from the council's membership. DAC members will be expected to attend meetings regularly, provide leadership in various ways and participate fully in the council's work. As with other councils of the school district, membership is a one-year commitment.

Community residents are encouraged to participate in this important initiative to close the achievement gap. All council meetings will take place from 7:00-9:00 p.m. in the conference room at the district's Transportation and Operations Center, located at 1133 Lehigh Station Road. Those wishing to serve on this council are encouraged to call the office of the superintendent of schools at [585] 359-5021 or e-mail kgraham@rhnet.org.

Diversity Advisory Council

Schedule of Meetings

November 16, 2004

December 21, 2004

January 18, 2005

February 15, 2005

March 15, 2005

May 3, 2005

May 31, 2005

June 21, 2005

May Honored for Fostering School-Community Relationships

Judy May, known throughout the community for her innovative community programs and service, was honored during the 2004 Teenage Employment Partnership [TEP] and Scholarship Awards Presentation at the RIT Inn and Conference Center. In recognition of her work with teens seeking real-world job experience, May was named the TEP Partner of the Year.

With the support of more than 80 local employers, over 125 Rush-Henrietta high school students continue to participate in this important initiative designed to support student achievement. Peggy Tyler, director of Career and Technical Education, manages the school program and heartily endorsed May's work. "Judy May has been an advocate for the Teenage Employment Partnership from its inception and is a reliable resource for many school benefits and activities," Tyler says. "She is a hard worker who finds creative ways to connect business with outreach opportunities for projects such as the Teenage Employment Partnership."

For the past 13 years, May has worked for Sharel Ventures, run by Elmer and Sharon Potter, owners of nine local McDonald's restaurants. "My managers and owner-operators at McDonald's have given us the opportunity to work in the community," May says. "I feel very fortunate and blessed."

In addition to enjoying on-the-job experience, many students credit the program with helping their time management skills and refining their ability to prioritize. "When students start working 15 to 20 hours a week, they might find it challenging to manage their time," says Superintendent Dr. Kenneth Graham.



Pictured from left to right: Laurie Broccolo; Judy May, 2004 Teenage Employment Partner of the Year; Superintendent Kenneth Graham and Peggy Tyler.

"The students taking part in this valuable program know that their most important job is doing well in school."

Laurie Broccolo, founder of Broccolo Tree and Lawn, supports the program by hiring students. "We have such a strong bond with the Rush-Henrietta school district," says Broccolo, a member of the Henrietta Chamber of Commerce and proponent of the Teenage Employment Partnership. "It's a fantastic program."

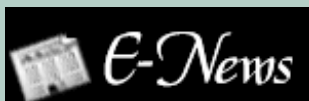
Also in attendance at the luncheon were Bob Woodruff, owner of FastSigns; Mary Ellen Peck, of Brentland Woods; Sandy Alvarez, of Monroe Tractor; Joe Klee, owner of Klee's Mobil; and Joy Miller, manager at Regal Henrietta 18. Miller, who was the 2003 Teenage Employment Partnership award recipient, addressed the audience. "They help me to remember to be patient and they certainly help me keep my sense of humor," she says of the students. "The students are always enthusiastic and they always have a lot to give."

In listening to Judy May speak about her experiences with the students, she wouldn't have it any other way. "They think of us – and we think of them – as a second family," she says. "We are very proud of our work with them and we hope it carries through for the rest of their work experience."

For more information regarding the Teenage Employment Partnership, call the office of Career and Technical Education at [585] 359-5239.

R-H information is only a click away!

Visit the district's redesigned website for comprehensive information about the district, each of its nine schools, programs, services, activities and special events. In addition to breaking news, the site is also used as an important communication tool to post emergency and weather-related school closings, late arrivals and early dismissals. Many teachers also maintain web pages on the site which feature classroom specific information that supports education.



E-News is a feature that has been added to the site for subscriber convenience. To subscribe, visit www.rhnet.org today and start receiving brief e-mail notifications, announcements and reminders about important meetings, activities and issues, along with links to additional information.

Continuous Improvement is R-H Hallmark

More than 100 people attended the 2004 Rush-Henrietta District Leadership Forum to review student achievement data and prioritize dozens of school improvement projects that could prove crucial to enhanced student success.

Parents, administrators, teachers and school board members were among those attending the annual forum. In addition to celebrating many student accomplishments, they focused on ways to make our schools safer, more nurturing and as educationally sound as possible for all students.

"Each year, we have more than 150 improvement projects happening in our schools, and we have to prioritize them," says Superintendent Dr. J. Kenneth Graham Jr. "Each year, some goals get accomplished, and we set those projects aside. Others need more attention, and they become a higher priority. Our sole purpose is supporting and encouraging higher student achievement."

District stakeholders – a term that describes anyone who has a stake in the success of Rush-Henrietta schools – meet routinely, projecting school needs for the next three to five years. They discuss what schools can do differently to foster student achievement, a challenging task in such a diverse district. "We have 6,000 students who have very different needs, aspirations, home situations . . . and they are all asking us to do our best to educate them," Graham says.

Several years ago, when New York required each student to earn a regents diploma as a requirement for graduation, school officials adjusted curricula and teaching methods to meet the challenge. "We are making good progress in articulating our expectations for students in grades K-12 through the writing and implementation of curriculum maps," says Deborah Ryan Johnson, assistant superintendent for instruction. "There is more work to be done, but we are on the right track."

Ed Lincoln, president of the Board of Education, agrees. "I want to assure you that we have a reason to celebrate," he told those who attended the District Leadership Forum. "We have challenges, but they are not the same challenges that many other districts are facing. There are a lot of positive things happening in Rush-Henrietta."

Dr. Kenneth Hilton, executive director of research and evaluation, says significant progress takes time and effort. "Our kids are doing well, and we are improving," he says. "For example, our social studies scores continue to be among the best of 12 similar school districts against which we benchmark, and we saw great improvement in Grade 11 English language arts regents exam scores."

"We are devoting a huge amount of time, effort and resources to improving our results," Hilton says, adding that school officials are constantly striving for higher levels of student achievement. "We have some real bright spots, and we continue to improve."

Foundation News

www.rhef.org

Distinguished Alumni Honored

During ceremonies at the R-H homecoming football game on Saturday, October 2, Superintendent Kenneth Graham presented the Rush-Henrietta Education Foundation Distinguished Alumni Award to four exceptional graduates of the school district. This marked the fifth year of the awards ceremony. The Distinguished Alumni recipients also took part in the homecoming parade on Friday evening. Plaques honoring the Distinguished Alumni are displayed in the main corridor of the R-H Senior High School. This year's recipients are:

Janet Breen-Zinck, Class of 1972

- A.A.S., Monroe Community College; BS, Nazareth College; M.A., State University of New York, College at Brockport
- Assistant Professor, Monroe Community College
- Councilwoman, Town of Henrietta
- Member of Henrietta Foundation, Antoinette Brown Blackwell Historical Society, Rush-Henrietta Sports Booster Club, Melissa's Living Legacy, R-H Crop Walk, R-H Senior High School PTA
- Awards - Who's Who Among American Teachers, MCC Co-Curricular Special Achievement Award, Student Teaching Award of Excellence

Joseph DeGeorge, Class of 1970

- Board Member - Henrietta Youth Board, Rush-Henrietta Athletic Association
- Rush-Henrietta Athletic Association youth coach
- Committee member - Cub Scout pack 128, Boy Scout troop 332
- Co-founder, Saint Pauly Textile

Gary Junge, Class of 1966

- B.A., Clarkson University
- Coach, American Legion baseball team
- Rush-Henrietta Athletic Association board member [20 Years]
- Henrietta Recreation Commission [20 Years]
- Professional baseball player [Chicago Cubs organization]

Robert Thompson, Class of 1958

- B.A., Syracuse University; M.S., State University of New York, College at Brockport
- Teacher and local education administrator for 34 years
- Section 5 basketball media chair
- LPGA media coordinator
- Media volunteer - PGA Senior Open, PGA Ryder Cup, PGA championship
- Member - Press Radio Club, Bill Farrell Memorial Search Committee, Henrietta Public Library, Minerva Campbell Literacy Contest judge
- Rush-Henrietta Space Study Task Force chairperson



Pictured left to right at the presentation ceremonies are Joseph DeGeorge, Gary Junge, Robert Thompson and Janet Zink's daughters, Allison and Rebecca, who represented their mother at the ceremony.

With Solid Foundation, Graduates Embrace the Future

*M*ore than 400 young adults graduated from Rush-Henrietta Senior High School during the 2004 commencement exercises held at the Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial. Thousands of family members and friends helped celebrate their milestone achievement.

Superintendent Dr. Kenneth Graham highlighted the students' accomplishments. "To earn your high school diploma, you successfully completed more than 22 challenging academic courses," he said. "You have also passed, at a minimum, five rigorous state proficiency exams. Whatever the path that you've chosen, know that as you face these new beginnings, that you can do so with confidence. Your high school education has prepared you well. You can . . . and will succeed."

Other school leaders addressed the students, lauding the graduates' accomplishments and encouraging them to pursue their goals and dreams with vigor. Speakers included David Pennella, then president of the Board of Education; Beth Patton, high school principal; Nancy Scarborough, a retiring high school English teacher; and Mike Staffeld, a social studies teacher at the school.

Student speakers included Eric Wilusz, the class valedictorian, and Corinne Paull, the salutatorian. Varun Mehta and Julie Sauer, president and vice president of the Class of 2004, respectively, welcomed those in attendance. Chi Chi Inya, Caitlin Macauley, Liz Pennella and Elysia Ryan presented the class gift – an aquarium – to the school. David Montanaro, president of the student council, along with Lacey Godden and Tad Mack, of the senior class council, presided during the tassel ceremony.

"I was thrilled for our students as they walked across the stage, for their teachers who guided their academic successes and for their families who supported their efforts," says Principal Patton. "The evening left us with a tremendous feeling of accomplishment and pride in our schools."

Commencement featured a number of rousing musical performances. The high school's Symphonic Band performed, as did the R-H Singers and the R-H Mixed Chorus. Soloist Shirley Horton nearly stole the show with a stirring rendition of the Carole King classic, "You've Got a Friend."

Graduates in the Class of 2004 say they were fortunate to grow up in Rush-Henrietta where educational opportunities, which extend well beyond the classroom, abound. Such opportunities have given them a solid foundation for life that will enable them to embrace the future.

Class of 2004

Students and Schools Give Extra Effort During Summer

Thanks to community support, Rush-Henrietta offered additional learning opportunities to nearly 800 students this past summer. The vast majority made the most of their experience, school officials say.

At the elementary level, students were provided additional English language arts and math instruction. At the middle and high school levels, students were given the opportunity to pass courses they needed for promotion or to meet graduation requirements. "The smaller class sizes and concentrated instruction that is offered in a summer school setting is very motivating for some students," says Deborah Ryan Johnson, assistant superintendent for instruction. "Many students who experienced success this summer are sure to carry that over into their fall classes."

R-H offers three major summer programs for students. More than 300 children in grades K-5 attended the Summer Math and Reading Time [SMART] program. For five weeks, the SMART program was held at Crane Elementary School for three hours each weekday. Two teachers led each class of about 20 students.

Several years ago, Dr. Kenneth Hilton, executive director of research and evaluation, studied how well children maintained their reading skills between first and second grades. "The children who took part in our summer SMART program maintained or improved their reading skills," he says.

"Conversely, when we studied the children who were invited to attend, but did not, their reading abilities declined dramatically."

At the Middle School Summer Academy, held at Burger Middle School, more than 130 students took part in a variety of programs designed to shore up their skills. For example, 18 students took part in a developmental reading clinic, an intensive program designed to help those who are more than two years behind in their reading skills. "We make it hard for kids to fall through the cracks and the vast majority of them were promoted as a result," Hilton says.

The district also offered a Senior High School summer program. More than 300 students attended the six-week courses offered at the Ninth Grade Academy. In addition to remediation classes in core subjects such as English, math, science and social studies, offerings included drivers' education and several accelerated programs – such as health, participation in government and economics.

"We are fortunate to have a Board of Education that recognizes the incredible value of these summer programs and a community that is willing to provide an extra boost to these youngsters," Hilton says. "Rush-Henrietta offers a tremendous safety net . . . a second chance for kids. Many students are able to redeem themselves and get back on track during the summer."

Flu Prevention Tips

With a shortage of flu vaccine this year, the following flu prevention tips, as provided to the district by the Center for Disease Control, may be helpful to residents in the Rush-Henrietta school community. Taking such precautions can prevent illness and help to ensure good attendance at work and school.

How Germs Spread

Illnesses like the flu [influenza] and colds are caused by viruses that infect the nose, throat and lungs. The flu and colds usually spread from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

How to Help Stop the Spread of Germs

- Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough.
- Clean your hands often.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue and then throw it away.
- Cover your cough or sneeze if you do not have a tissue; then, clean your hands, and do so every time you cough or sneeze.
- Practice other good health habits . . . get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious food. Practicing healthy habits will help you stay healthy during flu season and all year long.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth . . . germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches their eyes, nose or mouth. Germs can live for a long time [some can live for two hours or more] on surfaces like doorknobs, desks and tables.
- Clean your hands often. When available, wash your hands with soap and warm water, then rub your hands vigorously together and scrub all surfaces. Wash for 15 to 20 seconds. It is the soap combined with the scrubbing action that helps dislodge and remove germs. When soap and water are not available, alcohol-based disposable hand wipes or gel sanitizers may be used. You can find them in most supermarkets and drugstores. If using a gel, rub the gel in your hands until they are dry. The gel doesn't need water to work; the alcohol in the gel kills germs that cause colds and the flu.*
- Stay home when you are sick. When sick or have flu symptoms, stay home, get plenty of rest and check with a health care provider as needed. Employers may need a doctor's note for an excused absence. Remember . . . keeping your distance from others may protect them from getting sick.

* Source: FDA/CFR Food Safety A to Z Reference Guide, September 2001: Hand washing.

Common symptoms of the flu include:

- fever [usually high]
- headache
- extreme tiredness
- cough
- sore throat
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle ache
- nausea, vomiting and diarrhea [much more common among children than adults]

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R-H Educators Present Exemplary Program at 2004 NYSSBA Convention

Dr. Kenneth Graham, superintendent of schools, along with Sue A. Smith, Board of Education member; Mark Turner, principal of Sherman Elementary School; and Louise Fredette, Sherman Elementary School reading teacher, presented one of Rush-Henrietta's exemplary programs at the recently held 85th Annual Convention and Educational Trade Show of the New York State School Boards Association.

In keeping with the convention theme, leading children to excellence, the team presented information about the district's Kindergarten Extended Education Program [KEEP]. The program was first piloted in Rush-Henrietta in the 2002-2003 school year. Based on the success of the pilot, it has been extended to all five district elementary schools. Since its inception, KEEP has attracted the interest of educators throughout the United States for being an effective strategy for closing the achievement gap.

Based on achievement on a number of "reading readiness" assessments, children are selected to participate in KEEP. Children in the program receive an extra hour of instruction four days per week. Kindergartners with a deficient in reading readiness skills who are placed in the program quickly catch-up and many end on par with their classmates. In addition, many retain these gains through first grade.

Program data, observations and interviews continue to validate the programmatic success of KEEP. To date, KEEP is a very effective academic intervention and a cost-effective reading remediation program for kindergartners. For more information regarding KEEP, please contact the office of the superintendent of schools at [585] 359-5021.