

Superintendent's Opening Message
Canton Public Schools
August 25, 2008

Good Morning and Welcome Back! I hope you enjoyed the breakfast this morning as well as the opportunity to renew friendships with your colleagues. A special thank you to Rhonda and Whitson's Food Service for preparing and serving breakfast for us this morning. Thank you also to our students – Brian Magna, Jackson Fitzgerald, and Wesley Nichols for their musical performance, under the direction of Tom Scavone.

I hope you had a relaxing and rejuvenating summer with your families. I don't know about you, but this summer seemed to go by extremely quickly. Some people say that is because I'm getting older, and I suppose they're right.

Every August I like to visit the school buildings and check on the various maintenance and cleaning projects that have been in progress over the summer months. Each of our buildings, along with the grounds look terrific as we begin the year. I want to take this opportunity to thank the entire custodial and maintenance staff for all of their hard work this summer.

The main reason we are able to begin school in such an orderly manner is due to the efforts of our administrative assistants who work throughout the summer. Please thank them for all of their efforts when you return to your buildings today.

The key to the excellence of the Canton School System is people. I want to take this opportunity to recognize the professionals who have worked so hard to give our schools the excellent reputation they deserve. First, let me recognize our Central Office Staff:

- Taryn Michaud, Financial Assistant
- Gladys Garcia, Payroll and Benefits Coordinator
- Lynn Young, Web Content Specialist
- Anita Sears, Receptionist
- Susan McDonald, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent
- Lynn McMullin, Assistant Superintendent

- Jerry Domanico, Business Manager
- Mary Dorpalen, Director of Pupil Personnel Services

Let me also recognize our building administrators whose leadership enables our teachers and students to do their best work everyday:

- Gary Gula, Canton High School Principal
- Dr. Nancy Bean, Canton High School Assistant Principal
- Joe Scheideler, Canton Middle School Principal
- Dr. Jordan Grossman, Canton Intermediate School Principal
- Andy Robbin, Cherry Brook Primary School Principal

We are fortunate to have staff members who have dedicated their professional lives to the students of Canton. If you have worked for the Canton Schools for 15 years or more, please stand; for 20 years or more; 25 years or more; 30 years or more. Thank you for all that you have done and continue to do for our students.

I stand here before you excited to begin my second full year as your Superintendent of Schools. We have so much to celebrate as a school system. This summer, I had the pleasure of reading most, if not all, of your reflections on your accomplishments working on your Professional Growth Objectives from last year. It was so exciting for me to review the student achievement data and see how your students progressed throughout the year due to your hard work. We also have reason to celebrate our students' success on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test and on the Connecticut Mastery Test:

- Canton made the “Top Ten” school districts in the state on three of the four tests: 7th in the state in math; 10th in the state in science; 3rd in the state in reading.
- On three of the four tests, the highest percentage of students scored in the Advanced band: 45% in math, 54% in reading, and 55% in writing.
- The average gain “at goal” across the four tests was 17.5%; the average gain at Advanced was 13.5%.
- In our Demographic Reference Group, Canton ranked 1st in Math, 1st in Reading, 2nd in Science, and 4th in Writing.

- On the Connecticut Mastery Test, in Science, the first year Science was tested, 85% of our fifth graders met goal and 26% of our students scored in the advanced band. In Grade 8, 84% met goal and 41% scored in the Advanced band.
- Our students demonstrated great growth over time, sometimes double-digit percentage point improvements. The Class of 2012 improved from 79% to 91% at goal in Math; from 79% to 87% at goal in reading. The Class of 2013 improved from a 59% to 88% at goal in math, from 54% to 86% at goal in reading, and 67% to 80% at goal in writing.
- In the Advanced Band, 55% of our sixth graders in math, 47% of our seventh graders in math, and 55% of our eighth graders in math.
- Our third graders math scores improved from 66% at goal in math last year to 79% at goal this year.
- Our seventh graders made a 29% point gain in math, a 32% point gain in reading, and a 13 point gain in writing.
- A prominent gender gap in writing in grade 8 was significantly reduced from a 24% point gap in 2006 and a 25% point gap in 2007 to an 8% point gap this year.

All of you sitting in this room, whether you work with pre-schoolers or twelfth graders, whether you are a teacher, paraeducator, or tutor, have created an environment where our students can succeed. There are always many factors that result in our student's achievement on these assessments, but I am convinced that are students did so well this past year because of the focus you put on various areas of our curriculum that needed improvement based upon the analysis of the achievement data. You created action plans to improve student learning and were successful.

So, we have much to celebrate – student achievement is on the rise in Canton. Yet, we must continue to work hard so that ALL of our students are successful. We must ensure that our students with special needs continue to make progress toward our grade level standards; we need to work with students on having them make connections and evaluate the text they are reading.

As we look ahead to this coming year, the primary district wide goal is to help you continue your work by training you in a “data team process”. I don't look at this as a new initiative, yet a formalization of a process that

will help our students to continuously improve. What is a “data team”? A data team is a grade-level, department, or interdisciplinary team that examines student work generated from common formative assessments. Data team meetings are collaborative, structured, scheduled meetings that focus on effective teaching and learning. “Data teams adhere to continuous improvement cycles, examine patterns and trends, and establish specific timelines, roles, and responsibilities to facilitate analysis that results in action.”

Our administrative team, along with team leaders and department chairs were trained in this process over the summer. Your building administrators will be giving you an overview of the process. My expectation is that formalized data teams will be formed this fall with teams analyzing student achievement data at your fingertips. Every certified staff member will be part of a data team this coming year.

My belief is that we can’t ask you to follow-through with any district goal without providing appropriate training and resources. To that end, we will spend the full day October 10th Professional Development day learning about the Data Team process. This is an exciting journey! We are going to be learning together and I invite you to take the initial steps with me and our administrative team. The Canton Public Schools are on the verge of greatness because of our outstanding staff and the community support we receive. As I told the Board of Education last week, our School District is becoming a “lighthouse district in the Farmington Valley”, one that others have their eye on.

I know the enthusiasm and passion you have for your work because I share that feeling with you. As Canton teachers, you believe in high standards. I ask you to hold true to high standards this year, even as you never lose sight of the 20 to 25 individual lives before you each day in your classroom. Consider the various abilities of the students in your classroom and think about those implications for your professional work. The only thing, the students in front of you have in common is their age, if that. You are challenged to meet your students’ individual needs. This is not an easy task. There is nothing easy about what you do. I offer you this thought today as we begin to embrace a new school year. We must have trust and balance.

First, trust yourself. If you are new to Canton this year, you have been selected because you demonstrated your ability to be an outstanding teacher,

and we have great confidence in your ability to teach. If, on the other hand, you have been teaching in Canton for many years, you have developed the wisdom, skills, and the instincts to be successful.

We also need to trust one another. Each of us has a part to play in making our schools excellent. No one is more or less important than any other person. We need to collaborate with each other and trust one another to put the interests of children first.

Secondly, we need to find that balance in our lives, me included. I am reminded of a philosophy professor who stood before his class and had some items in front of him. When the class began, wordlessly he picked up a very large and empty jar and proceeded to fill it with rocks about 2 inches in diameter. He then asked students if the jar was full. They agreed it was. So the professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles, of course, rolled into the open areas between the rocks. He then asked students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was. The professor picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else.

“Now,” said the professor, “I want you to recognize that this jar represents your life. The rocks are the important things – your family, your partner, your health, your children – things that if everything else was lost and only they remained, your life would be full. The pebbles are things that matter like your job, your house, your car. The sand is everything else, the small stuff.”

“If you put the sand into the jar first,” he continued, “there is no room for the pebbles or the rocks. The same goes for your life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for things that should be really important to you. Let’s take care of the rocks first, things that really matter. Let’s set our priorities. The rest is just sand.

With all of us working together, the 2008-2009 school year will prove to be an extraordinary one for our schools.

I want to leave you with this poem on “What teachers make”. I thought it was very appropriate for today.

What Teachers Make, or
Objection Overruled, or
If things don't work out, you can always go to law school

By Taylor Mali
www.taylormali.com

He says the problem with teachers is, "What's a kid going to learn from someone who decided his best option in life was to become a teacher?" He reminds the other dinner guests that it's true what they say about teachers:

Those who can, do; those who can't, teach.

I decide to bite my tongue instead of his and resist the temptation to remind the other dinner guests that it's also true what they say about lawyers.

Because we're eating, after all, and this is polite company.

*"I mean, you're a teacher, Taylor," he says.
"Be honest. What do you make?"*

*And I wish he hadn't done that
(asked me to be honest)
because, you see, I have a policy
about honesty and ass-kicking:
if you ask for it, I have to let you have it.*

You want to know what I make?

*I make kids work harder than they ever thought they could.
I can make a C+ feel like a Congressional medal of honor
and an A- feel like a slap in the face.
How dare you waste my time with anything less than your very best.*

*I make kids sit through 40 minutes of study hall
in absolute silence. No, you may not work in groups.
No, you may not ask a question.*

*Why won't I let you get a drink of water?
Because you're not thirsty, you're bored, that's why.*

*I make parents tremble in fear when I call home:
I hope I haven't called at a bad time,
I just wanted to talk to you about something Billy said today.
Billy said, "Leave the kid alone. I still cry sometimes, don't you?"
And it was the noblest act of courage I have ever seen.*

*I make parents see their children for who they are
and what they can be.*

You want to know what I make?

*I make kids wonder,
I make them question.
I make them criticize.
I make them apologize and mean it.
I make them write, write, write.
And then I make them read.
I make them spell definitely beautiful, definitely beautiful, definitely
beautiful
over and over and over again until they will never misspell
either one of those words again.
I make them show all their work in math.
And hide it on their final drafts in English.
I make them understand that if you got this (brains)
then you follow this (heart) and if someone ever tries to judge you
by what you make, you give them this ?????*

*Let me break it down for you, so you know what I say is true:
I make a difference! What about you?*

Go out there and make a difference! Have a great school year!