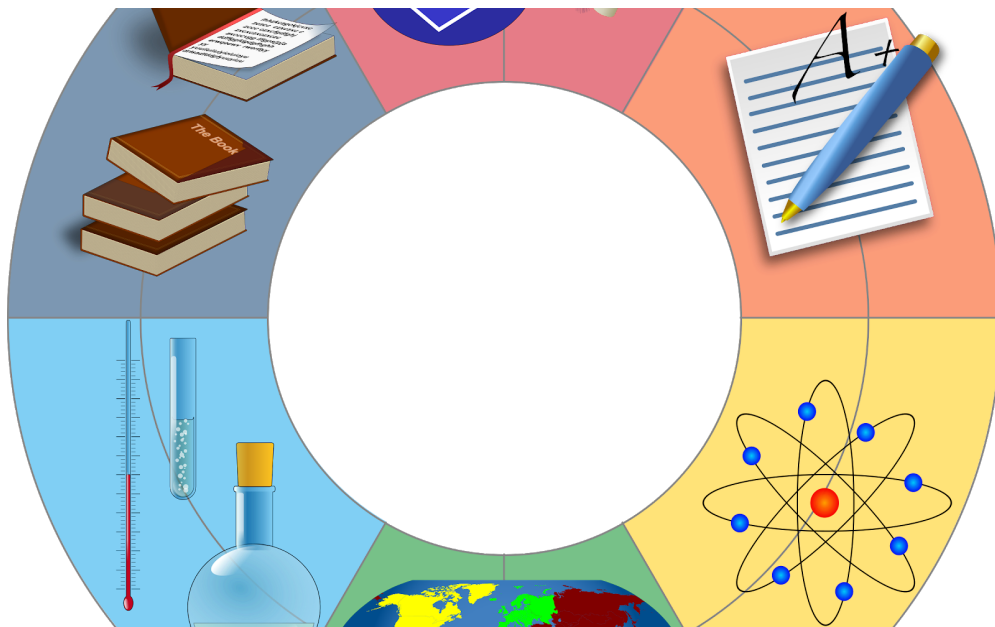


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# Superintendent's Message



This weekend, I reflected on community discussions I have had with PTA members, parents, senior citizens, students and staff. Parents asked, “How are we monitoring appropriate class sizes?” “Will we be losing good programs for our students?” “What internal practices will we be focusing on to impact positive change?” “What will the new Director of Teaching and Learning focus on at the school level?” “What actions will we take to support staffing in Special Education?” After robust conversations regarding the value of education, I felt compelled to share some thoughts and professional insights.

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Reaching back to my early roots as an educator in Newtown, I recall the myriad of metaphors we embraced over the years to make meaning of our practices and shape a vision for improvement. In the 80s schools were compared to black boxes with student performance viewed as unemotional inputs and outputs. When I first arrived in Newtown in the early 90s, the District aspired to align with Dr. W. Edward Deming's Total Quality Management principles originally used in business to bring about promising changes to large corporations. Newtown's Quality Model also embraced human needs, adopting the belief that students' basic needs of safety, love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization must be met in order for them to be truly successful. *Always made perfect sense to me.* The standards movement came close behind, followed by the Common Core that now serves as the basis of educational standards and increased testing.

I offer another less complex notion for the future – a collaborative culture of care that embodies trust. It trusts the expertise of the school community – teachers, administrators, and families – to consider the unique needs of ALL students, keep them safe, review relevant information to make strategic decisions, and let nothing get in the way of the work to be accomplished. Just the other day, I heard a story on the news about a goose in Montana. Discovered on the brink of freezing, rescuers attempted to unfold her wings that were fiercely and firmly folded across her chest. Upon closer inspection, they noticed she was swaddling a puppy and had shielded the young animal from the frigid temperatures. The puppy was warm and asleep, safe and sound.

No need to drive home the metaphor. The chilling facts are clear: despite unfunded mandates and new requirements, educators work tirelessly to care for and support their students. That care is instinctive and genuine. It doesn't matter what diverse needs exist among their learners. What does matter is that our teachers and leaders spend countless hours planning innovative lessons, revising curriculum, implementing changes to instruction that will inspire their students, and meeting with families to ensure student success. *These practices take effort, time, commitment, resources and funding.*

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Throughout this budget season, administrators have been transparent about the needs of their schools, the level of staffing they will need to support student learning, and resources that will contribute to innovative STEM programs, creative instructional changes that emulate concepts to teach content, increase the level of rigor to challenge students, and enhance engagement so all learners are inspired.

Newtown administrators shared relevant facts related to student performance and the strategic plans to address issues they have faced for the last several years. While student performance data was presented at recent BOE meetings, a follow up analysis will be sent in a future communication.

I want to send a loud and proud thank you to the Newtown Board of Education for their approval of our 2019-20 budget. The 2.7% increase over the current year will maintain core academic programming in math and language arts, maintain unified arts, support social/emotional learning, and our athletic program. The operational plan remains committed to world language in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, professional development and training for Special Education and regular education staff, additional paraprofessional hours to support teachers and specialists, and smaller class sizes in Kindergarten for our youngest students just starting in public schools.

The budget also calls for a new position that will support teaching and learning across the grade levels, focusing primarily on instructional practices that will continue to elevate the rigorous instruction necessary for our students. With the loss of a Director of Health and Wellness position several years ago and no additional administrative support for instruction across the District, an infrastructure that is typical of other districts in our DRG (district reference group), this is a critical position.

## A Statewide Platform to Support Public Schools

Negative press doesn't just exist in Newtown. In order to strengthen the support public education has in Connecticut, CABA (Connecticut Association of Boards of Education) has created a social media campaign, #ISUPPORTMYCTPUBLICSCHOOLS. The campaign encourages anyone who supports Connecticut's public schools to participate, either by writing letters to the editor, local Town boards, or online to celebrate their support of public schools and the value they have for local communities.

#ISUPPORTMYCTPUBLICSCHOOLS

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### Final Thoughts

Life and work are often ironically cyclical. If we only take a moment to revisit some of the foundational beliefs we embraced as a system in the past, these insights may actually serve a purpose and contribute to our efforts in the years ahead. Dr. Deming's view in the 90s called for a constancy of purpose, removing dependence on inspection models and numerical goals, breaking down barriers between staff, instituting rigorous programs for education and self-improvement, and, more importantly, *putting everyone to work to accomplish the transformation.*

I encourage all parents, staff, and community members to stay close to the budget process that continues up until the referendum on April 23.

Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue, Superintendent