



Oneonta City School District

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September 27, 2013

Dear OCSD Community:

Over the past few weeks I have been in contact with a variety of people in our district to establish a base of information from which to make a judgment on the effectiveness of the roll out of the Common Core Learning Standards. Our use of the *NYS Learning Modules* to accomplish this goal has presented us with significant challenge. In particular the pace of lessons, the time allotments for lesson duration and scope, and the performance gaps presented by the rigor of the units are among the issues we've identified in the initial stages of implementation. The fixed and rigid nature of the curricular outlines in the Modules has confounded the efforts of our teaching staff to meet the students where they are from a skill standpoint and leaves us with concern over the long term effectiveness of this model.

I understand that we are still members of the State University of New York overseen by the Commissioner of Education and that adoption of the Common Core State Standards is an expectation for all of the schools in our State. I also understand that our district adoption of the *CCSS* and the Modules represents compliance with this State expectation at the local level. The district remains committed to this compliance. However, I reserve my management right to provide flexibility to this instructional approach that will free teachers of a scripted approach and open the door to modification and adjustment.

The shape that this modification takes will depend upon a joint effort of District Administrators, Principals, Teachers and our Staff Development providers from *ONC BOCES*. On Wednesday night I fielded concerns from Parents and Teachers that will provide a basis from which to begin this work. Last night I met with our Administrative Council where we considered a structure of leadership to help guide the improvement efforts on a grade by grade basis. On October 1st I will meet with the Executive Committee of the Oneonta Teachers' Association where I will ask for Grade Level and Department representatives to serve on a Work Group whose task it will be to find modifications to our current curricular approach that is designed to meet the *CCS* Standards and that provides the flexibility that our teachers must have to address the needs of the student we see daily.

Starting on October 2nd we will begin a series of Grade Level Trainings and work sessions to unify our approach to delivery of the skills outlined by the CCSS. On October 24th and 25th we will use our Staff Development days to continue this work guided by our partners at BOCES and District leaders. This effort will continue on a monthly basis as we build a curricular approach that is mapped out and practiced by our instructional staff district-wide.

Running parallel to this effort will be research on available technology that will help us to share curricular resources from inside our school and from external sources. Using this capacity will allow us to bank lessons, store and retrieve student data and report to parents the progress that our students are making. As we go forward I will work with our Board of Education to develop a strong communication conduit that will be used to keep staff, parents and our community informed of the initiatives that our school is undertaking. In embarking on this work and in providing this flexibility I want to remind everyone that there are some points upon which compromise should not be envisioned.

It is fair to say that alignment of grade levels and departments from a curriculum, assessment and intervention standpoint is the expectation. It is fair to say that parents should be confident that our teachers and administrators are working together to provide a K-12 district program that addresses the skills our students will need to be contributing citizens in a world that we have yet to fully envision. Our Board of Education has committed their support to this effort and will continue to find ways to deliver that support with reasoned policy and fiscal responsibility.

I urge patience in the process of addressing this work and know that saying we will work together is easy to say and harder to do. I will do my best to break down the barriers of time, proximity and resources in an effort to keep the focus on the task.

I have confidence that we have the potential of solid leadership, great skill in our classrooms and support staff, a supportive body of parents and community that cares. These are great foundations from which to start.

Sincerely,

Joseph J. Yelich
Superintendent of Schools
Oneonta City School District