

## State of the School Presentation

Heatly School, June 1, 2017

Presented by Dr. Teresa Thayer Snyder

When I came to Green Island just shy of two years ago, this is what I saw: I saw raw potential, untapped, but rich with opportunity. I saw the possibility of a school that is unlike any in the capital region. I saw a little school nestled in a village which could be a prototype of the much vaunted community school and actually very reminiscent of the schools many of us recall from our own childhood experiences.

I looked at our data sets and, as I suspected, our test scores were low, our student needs were high. But I also saw educators who were as professional as any with whom I have worked over my long career, in a pretty broad array of settings.

I saw profound needs and I saw powerful enthusiasm. I saw a community rally around its children at the holidays so every child was cared for. I saw a school which packed food for children who were food insecure on the weekends and holidays. I saw the most essential aspects of a uniquely supportive environment.

Together we spent a good part of last year reviewing areas where we could manipulate the environment to address the needs of children. And that is a reflection on a commitment I made many years ago. When I became an educator, I fashioned a personal vision statement, a kind of guiding principle which I could use to keep me focused and centered. It is a mantra with which I begin every day and with which I end every evening. *Children, cherished and challenged.*

We looked at class sizes and realized that our children needed much closer ties to their teachers. Reducing teacher/student ratios at the elementary school was a means of creating those ties that allow children

to feel cherished in their classrooms. We accomplished this by re-assigning our Academic Intervention Services teachers to classrooms in grades 3, 4, and 5. Our academic intervention became reducing class sizes. While we wanted to accomplish this in k-2 as well, we ran out of geography!

When we talk about challenging our children, we are really trying to mend so many of their images of themselves as learners. For many of our students, the state of testing has only served to reinforce for them that they have deficiencies. Many of our students are living a prophesy of failure. The message they have received is that they are not competent and that message becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. To demolish that message, we began with the senior class. Last year we laid the groundwork for beginning a full year of college credit bearing courses, integrated under a common theme. This required teachers to be willing to step outside their own comfort zones, and to have their credentials reviewed and approved by Hudson Valley and the university. The teachers became adjunct instructors of these two colleges. We were able to offer to the students courses carrying more than thirty college credits for which they have worked harder than any group of seniors I have ever met. I can't tell you all the results, but one outstanding piece of the data set is that this year every senior has raised his or her grade point average, which is very atypical in any school. They have worked hard, they have mastered amazing skills and they have done themselves—and Green Island--proud!—**cherished and challenged!**

This year we also ramped up the curriculum for the other classes in the secondary school. We have eighth graders taking Algebra and Life Science, typically ninth grade courses. They will take Regents exams this month. The good news is many of them will surprise themselves and pass those exams, and the better news is if they do not, we have four more years to get them through them. The ninth graders are taking US history, typically an eleventh grade course, but our logic tells us that if

they have been studying American history in seventh and eighth grade, continuing it in ninth and taking the exit exam then will provide a better understanding and greater likelihood of passing. But again, no worry—those who pass will have earned that Regents credit, and for any who struggle, we have plenty of time and space to get them through it. I am confident in the learners, and that is because this year we gave the Regents English exam to our eleventh graders in January. Now this is one tough exam and I admit I was not expecting the outcomes we got! 85% of them passed, and they didn't just pass they knocked it out of the park! **Cherished and challenged**

We have raised the bar and the students have come along with us. They are achieving results that the earlier data sets would not have predicted, and they are doing so because this is a school nestled in a village.

I could go on and on, but I have always believed that adage that pictures are worth a thousand words. Thanks to Mr. Fong, the teachers who shared and the students who helped, I thought I would close this first annual state of the school address with a montage of a year in school. It is a non-standard measure which I relish because anyone who knows me will know that I do not put a lot of faith in standardized measures of growth and achievement because in my experience, there is no such thing as a standardized child! So please enjoy a testament to Children, Cherished and Challenged!