

## **School year off to a great start**

by Susan Ambrozavitch, Assistant Superintendent of Schools  
*Danvers Herald* – October 30, 2008

We are a few weeks into the 2008-2009 academic year. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of our staff, administration, parents, and at-large community, our students have settled into an enthusiastic routine. We have begun the school year on an optimistic note, believing that our schools are moving in a direction that will ensure equality for all students and academic excellence across the district.

All of the fundamentals for continued momentum are in place. First, we are in the inaugural year of a five-year strategic plan, developed with the input of over 170 members of our town community. This strategic plan is different from those preceding it, in that it includes specific achievement targets and benchmarks of accountability to the public.

Our full-day kindergarten program welcomed over 260 of our youngest learners to school. The work of the town-wide kindergarten committee has ensured that each child is offered the same curriculum, has similar scheduling, and expanded opportunities for learning through inquiry. The curriculum at the elementary school level has been re-aligned. Each school now follows the same reading and math scope and sequence for skills and stories. All of the same materials are offered in each classroom. A new social studies curriculum, developed by our teachers, ensures that students learn civics, geography, history, and economics. We now turn our attention to elementary science.

At the middle school, the focus continues to be on providing a collaborative and team-based approach to looking at student work and analyzing student data. The administrative structure at Holten-Richmond Middle School is also proud of the climate of respect for, and understanding of, the individual and his/her unique learning strengths and challenges.

Our MCAS scores are out, and the Danvers Public Schools have reason for optimism. As a result of the hard work of teachers, paraprofessionals, support staff, and administrators working in a collaborative and focused manner, it is obvious that we are moving in the right direction. Danvers High School was mentioned as one of the most improved high schools in the state when the test results were first announced.

Our teachers have a new three-year contract that provides for major changes in the evaluation system. The mutual goal is to have honest and open feedback between teacher and administrator about classroom practice and how these practices affect each child's achievement. Precision and uniformity in the way each educator receives feedback is key to the success of improving classroom instruction.

Each of our seven schools is committed to the continuation of Professional Learning Communities as part of their work. Results of much research over the past 10 years indicate that when — and only when — teachers exchange ideas, focus collaboratively to investigate test results as a team of professional educators, and look critically at the work students are producing, does achievement improve incrementally.

Your school administration will continue to reach out to the Danvers community and work to ensure that our progress in achieving the goal of providing each child with a world-class

education is transparent and inclusive. Above all, we invite you to become involved by attending informational meetings, monthly PACE (Parents and Administrators Communicate for Education) forums, PAC parent evenings, School Committee meetings, parent workshops, or simply by contacting any of us if you have a question.

Economically, these are difficult times. However, as Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester said in a letter to all school systems, “It is unclear how long this period will last, but we must retain our focus on improving curriculum and instruction. Now, more than ever, it is important that we share best practices, exchange ideas, and work together to find ways to reduce achievement gaps and provide all students with the tools and skills they will need to succeed through high school, college, career, and in life.” In Danvers, it is our mission to do just that.

We look forward to continued successes, and appreciate the support we have received from our townspeople and town government as we continue our work of providing the best education possible to the children of Danvers.