

2016 in Review: A Next Step Forward for the Vernon Public Schools

During this time of the year, everyone looks forward to the New Year by making resolutions and striving to make the world around them a better place to live. It is also an important time to reflect on the past by looking where we were, where we are now, and where we are headed in the future. This time of reflection has led me to making positive changes in our school district to improve student achievement. This is best accomplished by setting high expectations for student learning through relevant curriculum and a high quality teaching staff. High standards of teaching and learning will create an optimal educational environment for all students in Vernon.

As we begin 2017, one cannot help, but to reflect on the past year. When I started as Superintendent of Schools, the Board Chair said to me, "we want to take the Vernon Public Schools to the next step of educational excellence." At first, I thought that meant that Vernon would no longer be identified as an Alliance District, however, over the past year; I have found the educational potential in Vernon to be huge! The faculty and staff in this district have the capability to transform the Vernon Public Schools into one of the best districts in the State of Connecticut.

The key to success is creating systems and structures for district transformation, not reform! Today's students have different academic, social and emotional needs than those of our generation. Their needs are continually changing and schools need to adapt to that change. In order to transform the Vernon Public Schools, we must take steps towards the next level of educational excellence. These steps are grounded in the district's core beliefs; *advocate a "whole child" approach to student learning, maximize student performance and set high expectations, and integrate family and community with the education system.* These core beliefs drive our work towards educational excellence!

Here are some of the accomplishments that we are proud of this past year:

- Measuring the percent of students who met grade level mastery in Math & English Language Arts (ELA) in Grades 3 through 8. This is an indicator of student achievement (i.e. Level 3 or above on the Smarter Balanced Test: SBAC). Using a growth model for student achievement, the State increase was 3.3% in English Language Arts and 3.9% in Mathematics. Using the same growth model for student achievement, the **Vernon Public Schools increase was 4.9% in English Language Arts and 5.1% in Mathematics in Grades 3 to 8.** This is a positive indicator of student success in Vernon. The growth model is the best indicator of student learning for our district as measured by the SBAC.
- Rockville High School students (in the 11th Grade) ranked **2nd out of 15 districts** in our District Reference Groups (DRG) on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT - Mean Score) in Mathematics. Rockville High School students ranked **3rd out of 15 districts** in our DRG on the SAT (Mean Score) in English Language Arts. The SATs have been re-designed to a skills-based achievement test for students to be college ready.
- Over 80% of the Rockville High School Graduates (Class of 2016) are furthering their education at the college level. Some of the colleges our students were accepted to include: Princeton University, Brigham Young University (BYU), UCLA, PENN State University, University of North Carolina (UNC), Assumption College, Hofstra University, Emerson College, Marist College, and the University of Connecticut.

- Fifty-seven (57) Rockville High School students were winners in the 2016 Scholastic Art and Writing Awards presented by the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers. Rockville High School students received 142 awards, including 31 Gold Keys, 44 Silver Keys, and 67 Honorable Mentions, the highest number of any participating high school in the State of Connecticut. One Rockville High School student also received a 2016 Gold Writing Portfolio Award. Students whose works merit a national award are considered for scholarships, publication opportunities, and national exhibition.
- The CIAC Unified Sports staff has identified Rockville High School as a Unified Champion Banner School. This is a national award sponsored by Special Olympics International. The Unified program at Rockville High School serves as a model not only for Connecticut schools but for high schools throughout the country.
- 106 students at Rockville High School received college credit through their academic studies in Vernon. Students either passed an Advanced Placement Exam, UConn Early College Experience Course or an articulated class with Manchester Community Colleges. Getting college credits in high school helps the pathway towards a meaningful post-secondary experience. Most of the students received multiple credits in more than one course at RHS.
- The Vernon Public School District was awarded a \$377,000 grant for family and community engagement through the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. This grant award will enhance efforts to build strong connections and relationships between parents and teachers at local schools. The district-wide plan is geared toward a school and community partnership and will use the money to set up an office of family engagement, the anticipated main conduit for student-teacher communication. In addition, a family-school liaison will be assigned for each building.
- The Vernon Public Schools received a \$650,000 grant to improve school security to ensure that students are safe. The focus was a series of upgrades to the security systems in schools throughout town to keep students safer while providing first responders with more information in less time. Security cameras for about 700,000 square feet of school space throughout town were added to areas that previously weren't covered, and the entire school system's cameras are now on a single access platform. Remote access is available, but restricted to certain users, including the Vernon Police Department, which has a video monitor in its dispatch center that allows police to log in to any school to see live video of an incident prior to arrival.
- The Vernon Board of Education received four Communication Awards from CABA (Connecticut Association of Boards of Education). The top awards were for Social Media (District Facebook Page) and for our Special Project – The Vernon Public Schools Communications Plan & Billboard. The two honorable mentions were for the District Annual Budget and the Rockville HS Student Handbook. These awards exemplify the district's mission of open communications, community outreach, and transparency to the community.
- In June 2016, the district conducted an end of the year survey of over 650 people in the community and received the following results: 75% of the people rated the overall education in Vernon a grade of "A" or "B". Most people (91.8%) say they have effective home communications with their schools. In the survey, 80.3% of the respondents say the Vernon Public Schools is heading in the right direction in terms of educating their children.

- 2016 saw the completion of many building projects and capital improvements through the Town of Vernon Bonding, Alliance Grant Funding and our Capital Improvement Plan in the amount of approximately \$6 million dollars for our schools. New roofs on Northeast School and Skinner Road School were completed as well as a section of Vernon Center Middle School. Upgrades to the Rockville High School athletic fields were completed as well as the ones at VCMS. The parking lot at Skinner Road School was expanded and re-paved. Maple Street School got a new parking lot across the street. In addition, all five elementary schools received new cafeteria tables for the lunchrooms. HVAC improvements in the RHS main gym to correct longstanding overheat conditions, wiring for the initial phase of phone system upgrade, tank removal at Northeast School, Maple Street School basement classroom HVAC, exterior masonry repairs at Center Road School, kitchen renovations at all schools including new cooking equipment, new LED high efficiency lighting in all schools and replacement of the outdoor basketball court and goals at Skinner Road. These projects were completed in collaboration with the Town of Vernon and State of Connecticut to maximize efficiencies.
- The Vernon Board of Education won the CABA (Connecticut Association of Boards of Education) **Board of Distinction Award in 2016**. The CABA Board Recognition Awards are designed to recognize boards that provide effective leadership to their districts through the use of good practices. This program acknowledges the importance of school board members and superintendents working together as effective teams. This is the first year that Vernon has won this Level II Award and was one of only 14 school districts in Connecticut to receive such a prestigious leadership award.

When I think about the Vernon Public Schools, I always remember this quote from John Wooden, legendary basketball coach at UCLA, *"When you improve a little each day, eventually big things occur... Not tomorrow, not the next day, but eventually a big gain is made. Don't look for the big, quick improvement. Seek the small improvement one day at a time. That's the only way it happens- and when it happens, it lasts."*

As you can see, Vernon is taking the steps necessary to take the district to the next level of educational excellence. The above accomplishments clearly demonstrate the potential in the Vernon Public Schools to be one of the best districts in Connecticut. Together - students, parents, guardians, teachers, staff members, administrators, and board members work towards educational excellence every day, to make our district a better place for all children. I am proud to be a part of this culture and I can say that **2016 was the next step forward** for the Vernon Public Schools. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph Macary". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joseph Macary, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Town of Vernon, Connecticut