

# HIGHLINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

October 12, 2005

## *Memorandum*

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TO: All Employees  
FROM: John P. Welch

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### John's Journal

#### *Reflections from the Superintendent*

#### **Improving our work as a system**

One of my top priorities as superintendent is to help our district work better as a whole system to reach our goal of success for all students. Last week a team of teachers, principals, and administrators spent two days working on system improvement issues. The participants included:

Mary Edwards, Teacher - Global Connections High School (Tyee Campus)  
Max Silverman, Principal - Tyee Campus  
Mary Van Eaton, Teacher - Sylvester Middle School  
Phil Robinson, Principal - Sylvester Middle School  
Sandra Hunt, Teacher - Shorewood Elementary  
Deborah Holcomb, Principal - Shorewood Elementary  
Sally Wilma, Teacher - White Center Heights Elementary  
Greta Salmi, Principal - White Center Heights Elementary  
Phyllis Byers, School Board Member  
Catherine Carbone Rogers, Director - Communication and Community Relations  
Nancy Meeks, Co-Director - Special Services  
Beckie Bouchard, Director - Assessment, Evaluation, & System Accountability  
Alan Spicciati, Executive Director - Secondary Schools  
Susanne Jerde, Executive Director - Elementary Learning  
Dave Jarvis, Executive Director - Human Resources  
Carla Jackson, Assistant Superintendent - Teaching, Learning, and School Improvement

As you know, sometimes new groups struggle with getting into the groove of things. My experience with this team was exactly the opposite. Immediately people asked thoughtful questions about this work and its direct connection to the classroom and student achievement.

Over the two days, our work was guided by representatives from the Panasonic Foundation, a non-profit with the mission of enhancement and improvement of public education. For the past three years, the Foundation has been providing Highline with consultation, seminars, and system coaching support through an in-kind grant.

The group that gathered last week will continue to work together as a team and as separate working groups, each concentrating on a specific achievable result. Our work this year will focus on three key areas:

1. Creating accountability at all levels for student success.
2. Developing leadership at all levels.
3. Fostering a culture that marks Highline as a "learning organization."

When I use the term "learning organization," I mean something very specific. You know you are in a learning organization if:

1. People ask each other a lot of questions and also listen to one another.
2. People have access to information.
3. People take improvement seriously.
4. People approach conflict in a healthy, open, straightforward manner.
5. People are open and honest in assessing current reality.

I believe our system improvement work will lead to improved student achievement as we identify the right strategies, roll up our sleeves, and talk and work together. Our team's two-day session was a great opportunity to connect with principals and teachers and hear their thoughts about our focus areas. In particular I want to thank the teachers on the team --Sandy, Sally, Mary, and Mary -- for their input and risk-taking. I look forward to continued conversations about our work.

#### **In our schools**

Over the past few weeks I have been able to get out and visit an 11<sup>th</sup> grade advisory at Evergreen, math classes at Cascade, and classrooms at a number of elementary schools. I am impressed by the adult learning that is taking place every day. According to Peter Senge, a learning organization "is where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together." I am inspired by the commitment people are making to their own professional growth.

Learning and listening will continue to be my focus. We will continue to have conversations about a potential construction bond measure in spring 2006, our math and literacy professional development, and our high school re-design work to prepare all students for college, career, and citizenship. When we learn and work together, we move toward success for all students!