

# HIGHLINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

October 3, 2007

## *Memorandum*

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TO: All Employees  
FROM: John P. Welch

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### John's Journal *Reflections from the Superintendent*

Dear Colleagues:

I trust you are all getting into the rhythm of the academic year, now that the dust has settled after the typical rush and bustle of the start of school. It is always exciting for me to see our students return in the fall. The year is so full of promise and possibility in September!

As we start this new year, I ask that we all refocus on our vision of a Highline where all students from all backgrounds and ethnicities are successful in school and graduate ready for **college, career, and citizenship**. Together, we are building a school system that challenges every student, provides real-life learning experiences for every student, and where at least one adult makes a personal connection with every student.

When I spoke to teachers before school started in August, I said that one of the keys to creating this system is to know our students and ourselves as learners. I truly believe in building a learning organization where all of us - including (and maybe especially) me, are learning all the time in order to get better at what we do.

There are a couple of areas we will be focusing on this year to help us "up our game" so we can reach every student more effectively.

The first area is cultural competency - or in other words, *knowing our students*. As you know, we have students from all over the world, and in order to connect with them we need to understand something about their experiences and to incorporate that understanding into our interactions with students and families. It might mean that as a teacher, you learn to relate concepts to a frame of reference that is unfamiliar to you but really resonates with a child from a different background. If you are a paraprofessional, it might be accepting that parents from other cultures interact with schools differently than we expect. For all of us, it is recognizing the strengths a student brings to school with him and learning how to capitalize on them.

Several schools have volunteered for intensive cultural competency training this year: Highline High School, Odyssey, Global Connections, and Bow Lake. Our security personnel, counselors,

assistant principals, and social workers will also be participating in cultural competency trainings. I want to thank these schools and departments for blazing the trail. I recognize that this is difficult, time-consuming, and sensitive work. However, it is critical work. With a student population as diverse as ours, the best tools, curriculum, and practices will not move us forward if we can't deliver them in a way our students can receive them.

The second focus area this year is accountability, which is really about *knowing ourselves as learners*. I realize the term "accountability" has some baggage. The accountability I am talking about is not "blame and shame." When it comes to student achievement, we can't control all the factors. But we *can* look honestly for the things we *can* control and make changes in order to get a better outcome for students. What I'm asking each of us to do is to be willing to see areas where we need to improve, and then learn for the sake of improvement in order to better meet the needs of our students. That is accountability to me.

I challenge you to stretch and grow this year. Whether you work in a classroom or an office, whether you work directly with students or support those who do, whether you are new to this work or have years of experience, I ask to you to keep learning, as we expect our students to be learning. I pledge to keep learning too.

Thank you for all you do in support of students. Each of you plays an important role in student achievement. I know for many of you this is a labor of love. Please know that you make a tremendous impact on the lives of our students.