

Celebrations and Challenges

A look inside District 220

Not surprisingly, educators measure joy and fulfillment in terms of how much we have learned and grown from an event. According to this criteria, my first few months as District 220 superintendent have been ecstatic.

My new role has allowed me to interact with students from pre-kindergarten to high school. In the last two months, I've had the opportunity to attend many of the "Back to School" night programs at our schools, watch our high school athletes in action, visit classes at the middle schools, and—my favorite highlight—have lunch with several second-grade girls at Hough Street School, where their conversation centered around whether they should call me "Baldy" or "Mr. Shiny Head."

But before I launch into the topic at hand—the celebrations and challenges of the district at present—I'd like to thank Quintessential Barrington magazine for giving me this forum to increase communication between our district and the community. It is so important that we all feel that there is an ongoing dialogue between us. I'd like to remind everyone in our community that my door is always open and that I can be reached at tleonard@cusd.220.org or 847-842-3588.

Despite some unusual events in August—including storms and tornadoes, police in pursuit of criminals, and a septic line break—the year is off to a good start. The calm and orderly response of our children and staff to these unexpected events reflects their resilience, trust, and maturity. I'm sure you are as proud of them as I am!

As a community, we certainly have many reasons to celebrate. State test scores at our elementary and middle schools are some of the highest in years, with a continuing upward trend. In many schools, well over 90 percent of our children are meeting or exceeding state standards. And in some cases at the elementary level, an amazing 100 percent of our children met or exceeded state standards in math and reading.

Not to be outdone, at the high school, we can celebrate solid ACT test score results and offer

our congratulations to 11 National Merit semifinalists.

In addition, the October issue of *Chicago* magazine presented an evaluation of Chicago-area high schools for quality of education per dollar spent. Specifically, their panel of experts examined per-pupil expenditures and ACT scores. The data gave Barrington High School the magazine's highest score of all high schools in Lake, McHenry, and suburban Cook County and confirmed some of the same conclusions that were drawn by an independent committee of residents in the 2002 Citizens Alliance 220 (CA220) report: "That (overall), students in District 220 are receiving a comprehensive, high-quality education, though not an extravagant one."

But as a district, we still have ongoing challenges, as is usually the case in every school district I've worked for. In particular, I'd like to share some information about one of these challenges, the facility for our Early Learning Program. We are currently in the process of finding a solution for this issue, with a few of the alternatives currently under board consideration being non-referendum options.

In 1972, the federal government mandated that all public schools provide early learning programs for students qualifying in one of two categories: special needs (those who have identified speech and language issues or developmental delays, among other issues) and students considered at risk for academic failure in kindergarten. Students in both categories must complete a screening process to qualify for services.

District 220 started its Early Learning Program approximately 25 years ago. The program currently offers a variety of services, which include speech and language, occupational and/or physical therapy, and programs designed to meet the individual needs of each child. While most classes are housed at Woodland School in Carpentersville, there are also classrooms at Hough Street School and Arnett C. Lines School.



PHOTO: THOMAS BALSAMO

Dr. Tom Leonard is the superintendent of District 220 schools.

Built in 1958, Woodland is one of our district's oldest buildings and also our only facility without air-conditioning. It was partially updated in 2001, and additional improvements to electrical capacity and air circulation were made recently. For this facility to meet the standards that we have set throughout the rest of the district, it would need significant renovations.

Programs like Early Learning are the right thing to do for children, and I'd like to think that even if there weren't a federal mandate for this program, our community would ensure that these children were given the best chance possible for a good start to their educational career in Barrington.

Together as a community, we will find a practical way to improve our Early Learning facility... whether it is by relocating the center or by significantly improving the current facility. Several options are being discussed, and I'm confident that our Board of Education will find the right solution very shortly. We are all committed to adhering to our district's mission of "Inspiring All Learners to Achieve Excellence."

As we begin this wonderful holiday season, I hope we can celebrate our accomplishments and face our challenges—together. Wishing you a joyful and peaceful holiday. U