

My name is Linda Wallace and I am a parent of a recent graduate and current sophomore at Lake Placid Middle/High School. I also have 3 nieces and a nephew who graduated from Lake Placid in 2008 through 2011. My family has resided in the Lake Placid school district for 4 ½ years relocating from Glastonbury, CT. My husband is employed by the Lake Placid central school district transportation department. I am a certified project management professional and work from home for a major corporation. We relocated to the Adirondacks for a variety of reasons and Lake Placid was our first choice due to the positive reviews of the school district.

My interest in speaking to the commission is based primarily on what I have witnessed locally and through my daughters' experiences. Keep in mind that our school is very small so my views are coming from that perspective vs. what larger districts may experience. Additionally, my expectations are high based on coming from a well operated, highly functioning school district in Connecticut.

There are three areas that I would like to touch upon. Parent engagement, community/business partnerships, and leadership. I'd like to be very clear that my intent in speaking is not to criticize, blame, complain, etc. about the Lake Placid school district but rather use it as a launching pad for my suggestions. No school district is perfect. No school board is perfect. No school administration is perfect. No faculty is perfect. No school staff is perfect. No parent is perfect. And as much as we'd like to believe our children are perfect, we know that is not the case either.

### **PARENT ENGAGEMENT**

I hate to admit it but I did not get actively involved with the school until I continued to hear input and concerns from my daughters as to what was happening in their school. At first I thought it was just a "teen" thing, but as it continued, I began to get concerned and started attending school board meetings. Shortly after that, I partnered with some other parents to form CAREE, Community Alliance for Responsible Excellence in Education. Our mission is as follows:

*To establish a forum for the community to actively participate and provide input in the future direction of the Lake Placid school district for the benefit of all students.*

At the time, there were some unfortunate events already in play, and it was hard for CAREE to focus and positively influence until these matters were resolved. We are anxious to rejuvenate our group, build membership and contribute to our school. Here is what I see as challenges and potential solutions for parent engagement.

**Challenge:** How can parents actively influence and support local schools to ensure the best interests of students are front and center? I have recently learned that there are many grassroots organizations across New York that has been successful in promoting positive change and putting the focus back on our students. There is a shared decision making mandate but I question how effective it is. Are all schools implementing this mandate just to say it has been done or are they actively engaging parents in shared decision making? Why have mandates if there is no incentive to successfully implement and demonstrate results?

**Recommendation:** Provide regional resources to assist parents/communities in building/partnering with local school districts. Encourage parents/communities to establish regional parent/community organizations so best practices and ideas can be shared and less effort is spent on organizing and more effort on doing and making a difference. Hold school superintendents/administrators accountable for strong partnerships with parents. If there are schools who have successfully implemented shared decision making, let's use those as the model for schools who have been unable or unwilling to incorporate true shared decision making in their districts.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS**

With economic challenges, ever increasing cost of higher education and less than ideal employment prospects, it is even more important for our public schools to partner and collaborate with local governments, local businesses, private schools, local colleges, successful entrepreneurs, etc. There are so many intelligent, resourceful, and enthusiastic individuals in our community and if local school districts can take advantage of just a small percentage of that, there is much to be gained and the students will benefit from a broad cross-section of talent that will enhance what they get through professional educators.

**Challenge:** The knowledge and talent is readily available. The challenge is identifying opportunities where that knowledge and talent can be applied and school superintendents/administrators willing to avail themselves to these opportunities and think innovatively. Example, a local businessman identified opportunities for savings with smaller water heater for elementary school. Based on the fact that he has experience with electrical efficiency with his building, his knowledge is likely greater than anyone employed in the school district. Saving money in this ways, frees up money that can be directly spent on better education for students. Another opportunity is to bring in business people to talk with students and share with them how they use some of their knowledge learned in high school in their business. And share the critical thinking processes that they must employ to be successful.

**Recommendation:** Develop straw models for use by communities and schools to partner together. Pilot in select school districts, make appropriate adjustments and share with other districts. Provide incentives to communities for successful partnerships. Provide suggestions for school boards to evaluate school superintendents/administrators based on their innovation and willingness to think beyond the school walls.

## **LEADERSHIP**

Above all, we must attract strong, proven leaders to school superintendent/administrative positions. It is not enough to simply have your administrative credentials. While this is a necessary requirement, we need highly committed superintendents/administrators who not only have the educational foundation but also have vital leadership skills such as a high degree of integrity, dedication, openness, fairness, etc. in addition to the ability to influence, establish a vision and execute tactical and strategic plans. An effective leader will ensure that plans are developed thoughtfully, risks fully understood and mitigation plans in place to deal with risks. An effective leader will also ensure appropriate measures are in place and adjustments made when necessary. An effective leader will not do all this alone. He/she will challenge and develop others to use their critical thinking skills to continually improve the educational processes always with the student first mentality. Without an effective leader, so much is at stake.

**Challenge:** The current pool of school superintendents/administrators may not have the leadership qualities that are needed. Evaluation and measuring performance of superintendents is lacking.

**Recommendation:** Evaluate the existing school superintendents/administrators and determine where opportunities are for development and improvement. Provide education and training accordingly. Partner with higher education to ensure leadership offerings are part of the administration certification programs. Assist/guide school districts in the hiring process for these highly critical positions. Provide them tools to assess the leadership ability of prospective hires. Establish a state-wide template for evaluating school superintendents/administrators similar to APPR to allow for recognition based on performance results. Establish a strong mentoring program for superintendents/administrators.

## **Closing**

In my opinion, the education system and profession has been long overdue for change. The world is changing at a rapid pace but education seems to have changed at a snail's pace. And some of that change is built around technology but technology for technology sake is not the answer. Technology advancements are only as good as the associated curriculum and innovative teaching that is coupled with it and a strong foundation and leader to ensure technology is appropriately used.

We need to balance education with the realities of the world we live in today. This calls for innovation, curiosity, taking risks, forming new partnerships, and collaborating in new ways. And it takes a strong leader who will lead by example, delegate and develop faculty and staff, challenge students, partner with parents and community members to ensure the best education and opportunities for our children.