

West Jefferson Hills School District Mission Statement:

Students are the primary focus of the West Jefferson Hills School District where, in partnership with families and community, the mission is to educate and prepare all students to become active, contributing members of society by providing a challenging, innovative educational program guided by an exceptional staff in a safe, positive, caring environment, all of which promote excellence.

Back-to-School Address Given by Shauna D'Alessandro, Board President, on Behalf of the Board of School Directors, to the West Jefferson Hills School District Faculty and Staff

Good morning. On behalf of the Board of School Directors, I would like to welcome back all returning staff. We trust that your summer vacation has provided you the opportunity for much-needed rest, relaxation, and renewal. We would also like to extend a special welcome to those of you who are new arrivals to our West Jefferson Hills School District team. We anticipate that all of you here today are excited about the opportunity to play a role in ensuring that all of our students can learn and that all of our students embrace learning in the next 180 days of the 2008-2009 school year. We, as a board, collectively hope you share our enthusiasm and excitement, as our new leadership team, District Superintendent Terry Kinavey and Assistant to the Superintendent Suzan Petersen, step onto the field to start the game. And let the games begin.

For the benefit of the new members of our staff, as well as for those who may have forgotten, I would like to give you some background as it relates to the collective resolve of our Board of School Directors, and what this has to do with all of you here today. In January of 2006, this board adopted as official policy a set of Standards for Effective Board Governance and Code of Conduct recommended by the Pennsylvania School Board's Association, and we have reaffirmed these policies by public vote on an annual basis since that time. We have done so because in our professional development (yes, we have professional development opportunities also), we have learned from the data of the Iowa Lighthouse Study that a strong correlation exists between how a school board functions and how a district's students do, or don't, achieve. This correlation was demonstrated regardless of the school district's wealth, or lack thereof. In other words, what goes on in the boardroom directly affects what takes place in the classroom. For this reason, we are striving for excellence at the board level because we know that our performance directly impacts the lives of our students. And we are dedicated to making the West Jefferson Hills School District, and our students, the best they can be.

Now this is where all of you come into the picture. We as a board cannot accomplish our goals alone. You are an essential part of the team that is necessary to reach #1. Like the quarterback, you carry out the game plan on a daily basis in the classroom and bear the greatest share of responsibility for student achievement. We are all on the same team – community residents, parents, the board, administrators, teachers, secretaries, technology personnel, custodial and maintenance staff, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, and anyone else that has an impact within our

organization – and believe me, you all do. We are one team with a common goal and mission. Look at what we have accomplished by working together collaboratively with a spirit of determination, dedication, and passion. I am pleased to announce that with your help, as well as with the community’s support, our federal funding request for the alternative school initiative has become part of the House version of the Federal Appropriations budget. This is a huge accomplishment. It does not mean that the \$500,000 is in hand yet. But we are in the game, and with your continued help in sending additional letters to our senators during this upcoming second phase, we are cautiously optimistic that our request will remain in the bill throughout the entire process, and that next year we will have a high-quality, cost-effective alternative education program for the benefit of our students, as well as our taxpayers.

Our victory in the battle against PDE’s proposed graduation competency assessments represents another of our team’s accomplishments that benefits our students and reinforces our belief that we can overcome just about anything when we work together. Again, the match is not quite over, but we have dealt a great blow to this initiative by the sheer volume of letters and emails that were directed toward our state legislators in our efforts to make them aware that we are losing those teachable moments that make a difference in the life of a student.

We are committed to being the best board of school directors that we can be. If that means thinking out of the box and embracing change, then we will embrace it with enthusiasm. We will do whatever it takes to move this district forward from really good to great, and we expect nothing less than great. We ask you to do the same.

As we move into the new school year, we as a board are asking you to jump in and really play this game to win. Failure is not an option in this game because too much is at stake. Please don’t stand on the sidelines as some do during a close football game and Monday-morning quarterback the actions of your colleagues. That type of attitude did not get us two state championship rings. If we can have a winning attitude when it comes to TJ Football, then it is all the more essential that we aim for the top, think out of the box, and respect one another’s efforts, as we strive for excellence in the classroom.

We expect no less from all of you than we expect from ourselves and from each other. A dedication to excellence at the top of an organization trickles down to and permeates the rest of the organization. We volunteer with no pay, but with great purpose. We are willing to do whatever it takes. We are asking you to do the same – that is, minus the “no pay” part of the equation. If we, as a board, do not work as a team – if school directors undermine, micromanage, or lose sight of the vision, then we fail our students. If one brings negativity, dissension, and a “We’ve never done that before, so why now” attitude to the table, then those actions also fail our kids as the negativity trickles down to them. Our students deserve better than that. So does our community.

Being a teacher should never be defined as just a job. If it is done well, it is a vocation. We are asking you to begin the next 180 days with the passion, dedication, and determination that will transform your chosen career from job to vocation. How can we expect our students to be the

best they can be if we are not willing to do the same in our part of this collaborative effort that we call public education? We ask you to expect no less of yourselves than you do of the children who walk into your classrooms on a daily basis. And never forget that they are all children, and they need our compassion and care, whether they are five or fifteen.

We respect your input and value your creative solutions. When you see a problem that needs solving, we encourage you to make yourselves a positive part of that solution. Remember, however, that problems are rarely solved around the water cooler and are best alleviated by open, constructive dialogue through the appropriate channels. At a recent conference on education, a very dynamic educator conveyed to us the pillars necessary in moving a district forward. Those pillars are mission, vision, values, and goals. According to Dr. Deborah Wortham, these pillars must be exemplified in a war cry that is shared by all, a war cry that demonstrates what is wildly important to your organization and to its members, a war cry similar to that used by a coach before his team takes the field. We challenge you to adopt a collective war cry for the 2008-2009 school year, and to use that war cry to create successes together and to encourage yourselves and each other as you play your essential position in this championship game.

You are about to view a short visual entitled, "*Committing to Success for all Students.*" I hope that it inspires you in the same way that it has inspired me. We hope that you enjoy today's programs. Here's to a great year. Thank you.