

March 4, 2011

Dear Members of the Litchfield Community,

There are several items of importance that I would like to share with you in this update.

Recently we experienced an unfortunate episode of students harassing peers at the middle school when a specific group of students were targeted. As this behavior came to their attention, the school administration called a school wide assembly, explained that such behavior will not be tolerated, and reviewed the potential consequences for any student who continued to physically or verbally harass another student. Over the course of the next several days students who were targeted and those who had engaged in aggressive behavior were identified. Working with parents, the administration and school counselors facilitated the delivery of apologies to the targeted students, and imposed consequences on the students who targeted others.

Harassment and bullying are not tolerated in the Litchfield Public Schools. Our administrators and staff consistently follow the regulations outlined in the Board of Education's policy #5131.2, which is available for review on the district website at [www.litchfieldschools.org](http://www.litchfieldschools.org).

Since the incident described above, the Litchfield High School Student Council sponsored a Random Acts of Kindness Week for both high school and middle school students. The activities included a speaker who addressed development of personal character, belief in oneself and respect for others. In addition, an anti-bullying pledge was developed and signed by students and faculty members. At the Litchfield Intermediate School our students participate in the Keys to Good Character program, which emphasizes and reinforces the expectation of respect for self and others. Our youngest students, at Center School, participate in the Colors, Countries and Cultures program. Our district expectation that any form of bullying behavior, whether in the classroom, on school property or at school-sponsored events is expressly forbidden, is and will be strongly enforced to ensure that a safe learning environment exists for all Litchfield students.

Concluding 18 months of work, the Board of Education has now completed and adopted the district 2011-2015 Strategic Plan, which can be accessed through the district website. I encourage all community members to review the plan as it will serve to guide our decision-making regarding educational programming and budget development for the next several years. Of note is the long-term design regarding restructuring how we deliver educational programming in light of anticipated declines in student enrollment. Also significant is the long-term plan for reduction of staff in light of the probable enrollment decrease. Our latest enrollment projection indicates that during the next five years enrollment will decrease by

about 5.0%. A review of our staffing history indicates that since 2001-2002, as student enrollment declined by 17%, our staff was reduced by 10%. On average, for every reduction of 12 students, one staff position has been reduced over time. We are projecting continued reduction in staff through attrition over the next several years. As this staffing reduction occurs, we also anticipate that our methods for delivering a comprehensive educational program will change. The Board will soon begin the conversation with stakeholders addressing possible future changes to our program delivery model.

Finally, The Board of Education's budget development process continues. As previously reported, during December and January I worked with the district administrative team and the Board to craft our first draft proposal for FY 2011-2012. On February 9<sup>th</sup> I presented a preview of the *Superintendent's Budget Proposal* to the Board of Finance. The proposed bottom line increase of 2.53% was rejected by the Finance Board. The Board of Education has worked since that date to reduce our proposed budget and now anticipates adopting the *Board of Education's FY 2011-2012 Budget* on March 9<sup>th</sup>. The discussion has been robust and wide-ranging as we strive to reach consensus on how to reduce an already lean educational budget. The Board is committed to adopting a budget that respects the economic impact on taxpayers while striving to keep reductions as far from students as possible. This is proving to be increasingly challenging, as evidenced by the continued downward trend in our district per pupil expenditure state ranking over the past three years. As recently as 2007-2008, our district ranked 59<sup>th</sup> of 169 school districts in the state with our per pupil expenditure of \$12,836. Litchfield now ranks 91<sup>st</sup>, with a per pupil expenditure of \$12,970. At this writing, the Board has reduced the budget to an increase of 1.84%.

Please consider attending the Board meeting on March 9<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. in the Litchfield Intermediate School Art Room to share your thoughts about the final budget proposal. On March 21<sup>st</sup> the Board of Education will present their budget proposal to the town Board of Finance.

I sincerely welcome interest in our school community and cordially invite you to explore the educational opportunities offered by the Litchfield Public Schools. Additional information and data pertaining to the Litchfield Public Schools are available on the Connecticut State Department of Education website at [www.csde.state.ct.us](http://www.csde.state.ct.us). In addition, I recommend that you bookmark our district website at [www.litchfieldschools.org](http://www.litchfieldschools.org) for up to date information about our schools and programs, including our district activities and athletic department calendars.

I can be reached at [wheelerd@litchfieldschools.org](mailto:wheelerd@litchfieldschools.org). Thank you again for your ongoing support of the students and staff of the Litchfield Public Schools.

Sincerely,

Deborah S. Wheeler, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools