

Manchester Public Schools
Convocation 2013
Superintendent's Address
August 26, 2013

Good morning everyone. I officially welcome all of you back to the start of another school year. Before I share with you my opening day remarks, please welcome Mr. Keith Berry and our students to begin this morning's convocation program.

I want to take a moment to introduce to you members of the Board of Education who are with us this morning and support our efforts in so many ways: Mr. Christopher Pattacini, Chairman, and Mr. Neal Leon, Secretary for the Board.

The anticipation and the start of a new school year, even for me after 48 years in public education, has always been an inspiring time. We have another opportunity to continue our efforts to make a difference in the lives of our students. We have another opportunity and responsibility to move the Board's agenda of closing the achievement gap, improving school climate, and providing our students the 21st century learning skills. On Wednesday morning, we welcome into kindergarten the graduating class of 2025. They are depending on us to provide the skills they need to be successful and productive citizens during the middle of this century.

I told our new professional staff last week that the last two years of my professional career in Manchester have been the most rewarding. We began a journey of transforming our schools and school district, a journey of change specifically focused on the following:

- improving our professional practice, improving leadership, particularly in the area of curriculum;
- providing more opportunities for teacher job embedded professional development;
- implementing our own standardized assessment to inform our teaching and curriculum,
- creating additional opportunities for our students to maintain and enhance their literacy and math skills through an extended school year program,
- supporting the improvements in student and professional access to technology, and
- achieving greater collaboration with town and local agencies to address a wide range of service needs for students at risk.

It's been an honor for me to be a part of this journey of change and I appreciate the confidence the Board has in me to allow me to remain and continue this journey with you for as long as I am needed this year.

I know that change can be threatening and uncomfortable. As humans, we tend to thrive on routine and predictability. It gives us a sense of control. When there are big changes, we are suddenly thrown into a state of uncertainty. I suppose the only one who really likes change is a wet baby. On the other hand, fighting change, presenting a negative attitude, ignoring or resisting its meaning or importance will not bring success. Change is a process and not an event.

Besides these changes within the past two years, I know that the level of anxiety and pressure this year is greater if for no other reason than the additional responsibility we have to implement successfully the Common Core of State Standards, and the new principal and teacher support and evaluation system, and all of this on top of closing the achievement gap. Our recent state assessment scores reveal that we have considerably more work to do.

I wish I could do something to alleviate whatever level of apprehension that you are experiencing. I can't do that but I would like to suggest some ways to prevent you from being overwhelmed by the challenges and changes confronting us. Some of this same advice was recently shared with me and I shared it with our principals.

- Acknowledge any apprehension you feel and admit it to yourself and others. Challenges and changes cause legitimate apprehension. However, rather than being threatened by or dwelling on them, be encouraged by hope and confidence that these challenges and our response to them will have a positive impact on student learning.
- Make it a priority to enjoy relating to the people with whom you work. Much refreshment can be garnered from simply enjoying the people around us, especially if they have a good sense of humor.
- Be proud of what you are damn good at and act on what you can reasonably improve about your professional practice.
- Carve out time for yourself for reflection and rest even if it means turning off those devices that can enslave us to contacts from others.
- Establish collaborative partnerships and networks that enable you to explore and improve professional practice, exchange and challenge instructional strategies, collectively analyze and use student data, and engage and support one another.
- Find strength and encouragement from the everyday successes you experience with your students. Have faith in your students, even if they don't have faith in themselves. Believe in all of them and their ability to learn the skills and lesson you teach them. Be convinced of their inherent intellectual capability, humanity, and spiritual character.
- Recognize and appreciate each other's efforts and dedication. Come together each day, not only accountable to your students and parents, but see yourselves accountable to each other as a professional community.

- And finally, don't be unwilling to ask for help. Your colleagues are great sources of assistance. I hope that you also regard your school and district administrators as effective sources for support and assistance.

Despite how challenging 2013-14 school year appears to be right now, I'm convinced that if we approach those challenges with the conviction that we can address them in a way that is beneficial to children, we can meet those challenges well enough so that next June we'll be proud of what we've done.

For all of our other employees who do not provide direct instructional or professional help to our students, remember, the quality of your work and your level of commitment will and does have a profound effect on the effectiveness of teachers and administrators, and success of our students. You too have much to contribute in achieving a positive and professional environment in our schools. I hope that you find the same meaning and importance in my advice this morning.

And so, to everyone in the Manchester Public Schools, please accept my best wishes for the upcoming school year and thank you sincerely to everyone who worked so diligently this summer in preparation for the new school year.