

## Superintendent Dr. John J. Kopicki's Remarks – January 31, 2019 Celebration of Our Schools

WELCOME! Welcome to the inaugural "Celebration of our Schools" event here in beautiful Central Bucks South High School. My name is John Kopicki – and it is my honor and pleasure to serve as the superintendent of the Central Bucks School District.

Let's begin tonight's event right – join me in warm applause as we welcome the Central Bucks East High School Select Choir, directed by Christopher Villante. Ladies and gentleman, please stand for our national anthem.

Amazing students – amazing talent. Please, another round of applause for our CB East students.

Welcome again. Tonight, as I look out at this crowd, I am pleased to welcome community and business leaders, parents, volunteer supporters, students, and teachers.

Before you here and in the crowd tonight are the members of our Board of School Directors. This team sets the tone for us – and are steadfast supporters of excellence in education. These volunteers dedicate thousands of hours of personal time to helping us to lead this school district. They are your neighbors, they are parents in our school district, they are businessmen and women – they are our partners. We thank them for their support and for challenging us to make this school district even greater than it is today. Would our School Board Directors here, with us tonight please stand and give a wave?

Along with the board, our cabinet members, each of whom you see here this evening – works alongside our administrative team, our fine teachers, and our dedicated support staff – they help to provide the quality, world class education that this community has come to expect, and that our students deserve.

Our high school principals and their assistants, our middle school principals and their assistants, and our elementary principals and assistants all of whom are the instructional leaders of our schools who work alongside our teachers and others – getting to know and caring for your children while executing our school district's mission.

With that said, it is all of you who make the Central Bucks School District exceptional. It is our community of support, our amazing parents, teachers, administrators and students, **TOGETHER WE ARE CENTRAL BUCKS**. The Central Bucks School District is an amazing place to learn and grow. Each day we provide our students with access to the resources they need to take advantage of the many opportunities that a Central Bucks education provides to them.

Our students, our teachers, and our staff achieve great things day in and day out \_ the data I will share with you tonight bears that out. However – if we are committed – really committed to greatness, to embracing growth, change, and the hard work that it takes to **MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL LEARNERS** – we have more mountains to climb.

The Central Bucks School District has a rich heritage of high achievement, and excellence in all that we do.

Yet, we know we must strive for continuous growth. Like a mountain climber, we need to reach for the next level, and not back down from the next peak – we must challenge ourselves every day. Together – we must have the singular focus to do the best we possibly can for each of our students.

To that end we developed a strategic vision – a document that sets us, on our path forward – our five "Pillars of Excellence."

Technology, Community Connections, Finances, Facilities, AND THE CENTRAL PILLAR THAT ALL OTHERS SUPPORT – Teaching and Learning

Each of these “Pillars of Excellence” has a guiding vision and focus areas with measurable goals that were designed, to set forth a clear path for continuous improvement and educational excellence. While ambitious, these goals empower teachers and other staff to **MEET THE NEEDS OF ALL LEARNERS**. Over the past year, a great deal has been achieved along the way – but we have higher mountains to climb.

I share these beautiful words, previously printed in our Pillars document, to remind us that the inspiring light of this school district lies within our teachers – more than 1,349 individuals, who pass through the doors of 23 schools, to enrich, educate, and help guide the lives of more than 18,000 students. This is important work.

Our mission statement...this is our driving force each day. Our teachers, together with 102 administrators, and 1,091 support staff, focus our efforts on providing all students, with the academic and problem-solving skills essential for personal development, responsible citizenship, and life-long learning.

I’m not going to read every slide to you, but please allow me to take a moment to read to you the vision for this first pillar – The Central Bucks School District will put success within reach for all students by meeting their academic, social, and emotional needs, with rigorous, engaging and innovative curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

The work in each of the four other pillar areas is designed to support this vision through resources, facilities, community support, and integrated technology.

Our teaching and learning goals and objectives are divided into two areas – elementary – representing grades Kindergarten through six, and secondary, for grades 7-12. We begin with our elementary work.

Central Bucks is a high performing school district. The data demonstrates that. We have involved, engaged parents whose children – **your children** – enter our schools **READY TO LEARN**. Therefore – our charge is to challenge them, to GROW them. Each is a unique learner with their own strengths and areas of challenge.

Test scores and other measures of what we can do are important – but educating the **WHOLE CHILD** – that asks more of us. What are we doing to ensure our schools are welcome, inclusive places where our students feel valued, nurtured, and safe. We have engaged in the reading of “Culturize,” an excellent book by Jimmy Casas. As life-long learners ourselves, our administrative team, teachers, and staff often engage in professional development that brings new ideas into our classrooms and schools.

Our priority every day is to insure all students feel safe, confident, and comfortable in their school environment. \_– we must do everything to be certain, our buildings are secure – but also SAFE in that each student knows they can stretch, make mistakes, and take on new and exciting challenges.

We want them to become 21<sup>st</sup> Century learners – who can collaborate and communicate, and who can use their creativity and critical thinking skills, to be problem solvers.

To be an organization of excellence - we must be nimble – and stay aware of new curriculum and resources, that will provide our students, with access to resources they need to be competitive.

The roll-out of our new Math in Focus curriculum is a great example of this, and one we have been excited to introduce to students and families. What follows is a short video to give you a glimpse of this new resource, and how our teachers are engaging students with “Math in Focus.”

Let’s talk a little about test scores. This is data – data we delve into to help make instructional decisions. But it’s just that – data. To use Dr. Garvin’s words - it’s just one snapshot in an entire album that represents what our students know and are able to do. It’s a piece to the puzzle.

While that's true, we are still proud of our students' performance. Our PSSA scores remain among the highest in the state, and among our peer districts.

In fact, our 2017 English Language Arts scores place us first among all public-school districts in Bucks County – and 22<sup>nd</sup> in the Commonwealth. Our math results show us second among public-school districts in Bucks County, 31<sup>st</sup> in the state of Pennsylvania.

With an average daily attendance rate of 97% - it's clear our students want to come to school, and our families value education – this is something we can never take for granted.

While this news is excellent – and I'm extremely proud of our students and teachers – if we are to meet the needs of all learners, if we are really going to provide our students with access to the resources they need, along with the opportunities to become competitive in a global society – we can't rest. **We must always** look to the future and challenge ourselves – seeking higher mountains to climb.

Some of this important work will challenge us to infuse our instruction with opportunities that have our students collaborate and connect with others both within our community, and across the globe.

We must examine the old ways of thinking – and while we must not chase every shiny new thing – we should examine ways to develop our staff, better allocate resources, and implement those programs and initiatives that – after careful consideration – we believe will help us to meet the needs of all learners.

I would like to introduce you to a concept that many in our staff have already embraced, and that we continue to work toward implementing. Project based learning prepares students for academic, personal, and career success, and readies them to rise to the challenges of the world they will inherit.

Students work on a project over an extended period of time – solving a real-world problem, or answering a complex question. They demonstrate their knowledge and skills by developing a presentation or product. This is project-based learning.

And now on to our secondary schools.

At the secondary level, the education of the whole child, as initiated in K-6, continues to unfold, providing our students the opportunity to explore their interests, and talents through a more individualized pathway of courses and options. In an increasingly competitive, globalized society, our students are faced with challenges that we didn't imagine for them. We must partner with other organizations and resource providers to ensure that we help them develop strategies to be successful, overcome stress and anxiety, and make choices that will help them navigate the path toward achieving their goals and becoming the best version of themselves.

For many students – this pathway will change many times before they leave our schools; moreover, research suggests that trend will continue well into their working lives; therefore, we must provide our students with the necessary resources and opportunities they need to test themselves, challenge themselves, and learn through trial and error.

As educators, accomplishing this goal not only means offering more than 240 innovative and challenging courses, along with hundreds more extracurricular, co-curricular, and athletic opportunities – but also asking our students questions about what they want, and need, and then empowering them to influence and shape their schools and school cultures.

While we encourage our students to continue providing the exemplar of an amazing school community, they are already leading their peers across the county and the state by almost every measure of student achievement. As with the PSSA tests, our students' Keystone test scores are nearly or double that of the

state average in math, literature, and science. These phenomenal results are a testament to the hard work of our students and teachers – and to the support of their families.

Our 2017 math scores sit at the top of the county, with literature and biology second and third respectively. These amazing results illustrate the impact of our thoughtful curricular alignment and the hard work our teachers engage in to deliver our curriculum with fidelity.

Our SAT and ACT scores are also a testament to our students' readiness for post-secondary education, putting them in the best possible position to compete for spots in the nation's most competitive colleges and universities. These results are of particular-significance, given that close to 90% of our seniors (1,130 students) sat for these examinations.

Each of our graduating classes distinguishes themselves as examples of the best and brightest – in fact – members of the Central Bucks Class of 2017 secured in excess of \$5.7 million dollars in scholarships and grant awards.

Our students continue to challenge themselves – more than 5,000 of them enrolling in one of 22 advanced placement classes at our three world-class high schools. 67% of our students elected to sit for their respective AP exams, and 87% performed at a college-ready level that will enable them to earn important college credit, reducing their financial and academic burden during their first few years of schooling.

The percentage of students who successfully graduate and take on the next challenge of their lives is a significant measure of our success as an educational institution. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education cohort graduation formula, the Central Bucks School District is among the top performers in the state.

We are proud of our students' fantastic achievements as illustrated by their performance on these standardized benchmarks; however, we need to aim higher as we seek to build our students' capacity to make meaningful contributions in an ever-changing competitive global society.

Over the past two months, and extending into February, I will continue to visit our schools to connect with families by holding informal question and answer sessions we are calling "Community Connections." During these visits some common themes emerge including: How will we bring more flexibility to our high school schedule that allows for personalization and differentiated pathways? When will dual enrollment begin? How will we address the mental health issues that affect our young men and women? How will we bring our schools into the next century and beyond? These questions require thoughtful responses, and as you can see here – we are committed to climbing all of these mountains, and still more.

Understanding the social and emotional needs of our students, is an important component in the development of programs and services that support our students' growth and achievement. Utilizing the Pennsylvania Youth Survey Data (PAYS), our school leaders are better able to identify the attitudes, behaviors and trends \_ that exist among students at the middle and high school levels, and leverage resources that address issues like vaping, anxiety, and other social and emotional factors.

With the leadership of our principals, teachers, and Dr. Lucabaugh – we are pursuing access to community-based opportunities \_ that will both accentuate our students' experience and truly make a Central Bucks Education the premier experience that our students deserve, and our community supports.

One such example of this is a partnership that has our students learning alongside industry professionals in the field of biomedical research and making new discoveries. Let's learn more about our Biotech Partnership.

We are fortunate – this community never fails to demonstrate its willingness to step up and make these opportunities a reality for our students. Before we talk about our next pillar allow me to pause and present our second student performance of the night. Please welcome the Central Bucks West Chamber Strings, under the direction of Ms. Jessica Tosti.

Thank you, Ms. Tosti and students, that was beautiful.

Preparing students for the future requires us to equip our buildings, our teachers, our staff, and our students with the technology resources they need to expand access to curriculum – removing barriers to learning and efficiency – and promote personalized learning.

However – without a doubt - the most important aspect of any classroom, is the teacher. These tools and resources can only enhance the teaching and learning experience. The ways in which we incorporate them into our instructional practices, and the professional development we provide to help teachers use these tools, is essential to any successful implementation of technology.

With the support of his team, our director of technology, Mr. Jason Jaffe, has accomplished a number of objectives aimed at accomplishing this vision. From our 1:1 rollout that began at the middle schools, to the research and selection of a learning management system, to equipping our schools with robust WiFi access – these investments, are carefully planned and staged in order to ensure that we are spending wisely and planning effectively.

All of the investments we make in technology – whether behind the walls or in the hands of our students and staff – are planned with the same objective in mind – the support of our students and learning objectives. **We're planning for their future – not our past.**

For a moment – I want you to picture the classroom you learned in. My experience was a chalkboard, desks in neat rows, and a large wooden teacher's desk in the front of the room and the computer was the overhead projector.

As we plan for the future, we want to create instructional environments that employ technology to meet the needs of **TODAY'S** learners – not our past experiences. This is the mobile classroom.

In technology – there are always new, higher mountains to climb. We want to keep our student's data safe, but accessible to families and district decision makers. We want to help students use technology to prepare them for their futures, and help them acquire the necessary 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, they'll need to meet the demands of jobs not yet imagined. The future of educational technology is exciting, and with the support of our Board - Central Bucks is working hard to remain in the forefront.

And now on to Community Connections.

As we plan for this future, we call upon the resources here in our own community. These business leaders, community supporters, and constituents bring deep value to the Central Bucks School District.

We are blessed with the support of key partners like the CB Cares Educational Foundation, an organization that supports our schools and teachers through valued programs like 40 Assets and innovative learning grants that enhance the educational programming in our schools.

Our students, schools, and teachers are lifted up and supported by 23 active and engaged parent teacher organizations.

Partners like Doylestown Hospital, who lend resources and support to educate our community. Partners like our local chiefs of police, with whom I meet monthly. Regular collaboration like this ensures that we are communicating effectively and sharing information that can benefit our schools and school communities.

Leaders and legislators – some of whom are here tonight. If I may, I'd like to ask the following individuals to stand:

- State Senator Steve Santersario
- State Representative Wendy Ullman
- Bucks County District Attorney Matt Weintraub
- Tammy Mancuso, here on behalf of Representative Tod Polichock
- Sean O'Connor; here on behalf of Representative Meghan Schroeder
- New Britain Township Supervisor Cynthia Jones
- CB Cares' Kimberly Cambra, Nancy Santacecilia, Board President Phil Ehlinger, and other members of the CB Cares Board of Directors
- Dr. Vail Garvin, President and CEO of the Central Bucks Chamber of Commerce
- Bucks County IU Director Mark Hoffman
- MBIT Director Kathryn Strouse, and
- Jim Brexler, CEO of Doylestown Hospital
- And members of our home and school associations and parent advisory council. Thank you for coming tonight – and for your leadership and continued support of our schools and our students.

These vital partners are here because this is their community, and they want us to succeed – our success is theirs, when we graduate students who are ready to be contributing citizens, prepared to lead this amazing Central Bucks community into the future.

We are committed to providing these supporters, and all members of our community with transparent, up-to-date, relevant, and efficient communication.

There is work yet to be done.

Our continued commitment to quality two-way communication is an important part of this pillar.

We need to create opportunities to connect with all stakeholders through meaningful, two-way dialogue. We need to commit ourselves to ensuring equitable access to information; and seek new ways to engage lesser served populations. Through a strategic, planned communications effort, we can build trust in and support for our schools, our teachers, and our students.

#### Facilities

The maintenance of our facilities is an important aspect of our fiduciary duty to the stakeholders of our community. But quality facility planning and management goes beyond that. It's a commitment to planning for the future – in ways that are clean, safe, secure, reliable, financially sound, and environmentally responsible.

Working hand in hand with the Board and our administrators, Mr. Kleimenhagen and his team work continually to ensure the employment of best management practices – while staying focused on the responsibility they have to the safety and comfort of our students and staff.

Whether it's newly renovated athletic fields, modernization of library spaces, or HVAC improvements in our schools – a clear focus on the future and support of teaching and learning is imperative. One such project is the completion of STEM labs at Unami Middle School.

As we plan for the future, we must make responsible decisions about our facilities in order to ensure equity for our students, and the quality resources necessary to meet the needs of all learners.

Gathering quality data through the completed facilities feasibility study and continuing to focus on a comprehensive maintenance plan, will allow us to continue planning what's next for our schools and our school communities.

Managing our energy consumption, and employing best practices in management, sustainability, and operations will help us control our costs and direct essential resources back into the classroom.

The resources that our community provides to fund our schools and provide for the future of this community are managed through a strong partnership with our Board of School Directors and our administrative team.

The business office, as led by Mr. Dave Matyas, has been focused on ensuring that every dollar is spent with a focus on how it will benefit our students.

Quality facilities, excellent staff, and secure resources to support our educational programming are vital to the continued success of the Central Bucks School District.

Efforts to develop salary and benefit projection models help us to ensure that we hire the best and provide staff with competitive salaries and benefits that are in keeping with the community's resources.

**Make no mistake** – the most important asset that the Central Bucks School District has is **our people**. Dedicated, quality staff who are **committed** to our students, and to the art of teaching.

They are well qualified, and we are committed to their continued professional development. Our staff are members of our community, parents of students in our schools, Central Bucks graduates, and partners in our educational success.

Our ability to attract the best depends on our financial well-being, and operational efficiency is important to accomplishing this goal. In accounting, food services, auditing and more – our ability to efficiently and accurately track dollars and secure the best return on the investment our taxpayers make – is a responsibility we take seriously.

Over 80% of our financial resources come from local taxpayers, and 80% of our budget is dedicated to classroom instruction.

In honor of that investment, our efficiency is proven through five of the last six budgets passed with zero tax increase – and the second lowest per pupil costs among the 13 school districts in the county.

Planning for the future is essential in this area.

As an organization, we believe long term planning is the best possible way to ensure the district's financial health. Managing contracts and making changes that help us control costs can help us secure a bright future for our schools.

And the future is bright. Each day I walk into classrooms where teachers fill the room with energy and excitement, and our students love to learn. It has been my sincere pleasure to talk with all of you this evening. I thank you for taking the time to be engaged in our schools. If we are committed to the forward thinking, progressive mindset that it takes to build a culture that is open to new ideas and the hard work that it takes to meet the needs of ALL LEARNERS, then we are truly continuing to scale all

heights in front of us and growing the Central Bucks School District into the next phase of excellence. Our students do this every day. Every time they embrace a new challenge, overcome mistakes, and celebrate success. I'm proud of them, and I know you are too. Thank you for allowing me to serve your children and this amazing community every day. I am truly blessed to work among the outstanding individuals that live in this community. Thank you for your attention here tonight.

Before we leave, please join me in welcoming our final student performance, the home team – the Central Bucks South Jazz Band under the direction of Mr. Brian Cox.