



Presidential Acceptance Presentation
Marilyn C. Terranova, Superintendent, Eastchester
Annual Banquet – September 25, 2011
Hall of Springs - Saratoga Springs, NY

Good Evening! I would like to welcome you to our Fall Summit's Annual Banquet. It was especially heartwarming to see the recognition of my colleagues as they retire from serving New York State's children and families. Their commitment and devotion to public education is laudable and I am sure they will continue teaching others as they pursue the next adventure in their lives.

I was particularly touched by the bestowing of the Council's prestigious Distinguished Service Award to Dr. Geoffrey Davis. Dr. Davis was a mentor to me as well as a very special friend. Geoff was on my first interview committee for an Executive position in education. We graduated with our Ph.D.'s from the University at Albany and, each time I began a new position as a superintendent, he would send me a congratulatory note. In 1997, Geoff invited me to join the Membership Committee. The purpose of this Committee is to provide our members with a "Snapshot of the Superintendency". I was thrilled to be called for such an important committee and asked him why he had thought of me? In Geoff's most humbling fashion he said: Well, we're trying to come up with questions regarding gender differences and it's kind of hard to do that when the entire committee consists of "men." And so my real work for NYSCOSS began. Geoff taught me the true importance of our membership and what The Council could do for us. In 2000, Geoff recommended I take over the Chair position for this Committee. We surveyed our members on a number of issues affecting them professionally and personally. After writing each policy-oriented document, and then travelling the state to present our findings to you, I

gained great insight into what makes superintendents such amazing leaders of public education. I better understood the trials and tribulations you undergo each and every day. The resiliency you possess and exhibit enriches the leadership of the many you touch.

It's no secret that the past few years have been very challenging. The economic news seems to be at a stalemate, with the economy recovering at an incremental pace. New fiscal and educational policies from the federal and state governments seem to be dividing our school communities. People want the very best education for our children, but in a way that costs little to nothing. Many of us wonder what public education will really look like within the next three to five years. As I thought about the important education implications to convey to our leaders this evening, I thought about how education has changed in the more than 30 years I have been an active participant. I could speak on continuing policy issues such as the Teacher Evaluation/Principal Evaluation system and the Tax Cap. But I would like to focus my comments this evening on curriculum issues that are necessary for the everyday instruction of our students. They deserve to be given the best education possible. It's so easy to become side-tracked from our mission. When we focus on what's right, it gives us the strength to correct what's wrong. Leadership is associated with change and innovation. People who lead are willing to experiment, take risks, and innovate.

What does innovation mean in 2011? What is the inventive new work in education today? Highlighting process and the technology we use to get there is important. Highlighting the thinking behind the invention is equally important. As leaders, we envision the future of education by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.

It is very important to give the next few generations of students the tools to function in the 21st Century. Superintendents as strategic leaders, in concert with our Commissioner, act upon the understanding that "one of the most fundamental obligations of our society is to prepare our students to lead productive and prosperous lives as adults." It is essential that we must prepare our young people with a solid foundation in literacy, numeracy, and thinking skills for

responsible citizenship, career development and lifelong learning. A 21st Century education depends on an integrative approach to curriculum – one that unites core academic subjects, interdisciplinary themes, and essential skills – with an integrative approach to instruction in which modern pedagogies, technologies, and resources work together to prepare students. A focus on the development of 21st Century skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, and communication is essential.

Leaders actively seek and create new opportunities. In that same vein, the title of our Fall Leadership Summit is "Reimagining learning for the 21st Century: Technology, Collaboration and Innovation." A variety of partnerships exist that advocate for the integration of 21st Century skills. This Leadership Summit provides us with ideas and solutions and will give us pause to re-think; re-imagine what we do for our students each day. It takes a heartfelt commitment to focus on 21st Century teaching and learning that will see us through these difficult times. When the "dreaded reporter" calls to speak with us about the tax cap and how that will affect our educational programs, let's define our vision for our students within the context of providing the best 21st Century education we can; not necessarily with "more", but with "different". Ensure that the reporter understands that we lead with heart and that we and our staff create a spirit of community within our schools. We, as superintendents should talk more about what we are doing that is unique and different for our students. We should stress the courses our students are taking that emphasize a more global perspective; stress the opportunities we provide to students that focus on service learning in our communities and abroad; the trips our students take to Europe and Asia.

Building 21st Century partnerships is time-consuming, but the benefits to our students make it worthwhile. A colleague and I are working with Sarah Wang, building partnerships with schools in China. Applying for a grant that would enable us to begin a Mandarin Chinese language program in our schools has been in the forefront. We were finally awarded one this past spring. My district also offered our HS juniors and seniors an opportunity to go to China this past April. Surprisingly, 18 students signed on for a 12 day trip that will last forever in

their memories. They took an 18 week online program with an instructor based in Hong Kong to learn more about China.

Philippe, a senior, noted: The China Studies Program showed me that the beliefs I held about the Chinese government were erroneous and misconstrued, and that the people in China were simply trying to live their lives.

Charlie stated: The only fear I harbored ... was the two-night stay with the host families. Only recently had I stopped feeling uncomfortable with the idea of sleeping over at the homes of American friends ... now I was expected to spend two nights with a family I had literally just met. It was not until I met Joshua and his family, and stayed in their home, that I got a glimpse of what was *real*. Joshua was the young man in whose house I slept during my two-night stay in Shenyang. No amount of preparation could have readied me for the delightful time I was to have in actually living with the family of a Chinese citizen my own age.

Many of you provide your students with experiences that are life-changing for them – that’s what we do as Superintendents.

This Leadership Summit will illustrate how we can employ methods of 21st Century instruction that integrates innovative and research-proven teaching strategies, modern learning technologies, and real world resources. These are essential for our students to be fully equipped when facing a global economy and also mirror the focus of our State Education Department leaders.

Learners in this new century will face unprecedented change and they will face global challenges from emerging countries. Inevitably, they will be confronted with competing ideas, arguments, and information that may be different from our own belief systems or the belief systems of our administrators and teachers. However, it will be our moral obligation to help

students sort out those competing ideas, arguments, and beliefs. Our students must learn how to survive and lead amidst a variety of challenges to their own culture, in an increasingly diverse, global environment. All students will need a strong foundation to be successful in an economy that values education and skills above all else. We need to continue to open the international doors to our students' thinking and learning.

Last year, President Bob Christmann stated: "To become a courageous Superintendent leader, we must have an undeniable, indisputable and unwavering commitment to be the best we can be. We need to be able to face others around us knowing that we had the courage to do what we believed was the right thing and especially as our decisions impact students." As strategic leaders, and strategic partners, it will take creativity, innovation, and courage to change the face of education. Public education may look different because of our sluggish economy or new fiscal and educational policies, but it is imperative that we, as school superintendents, be at the heart of that change. You and I must ensure that public education is the "choice" for our state leaders, legislators, and our school community.

Therefore, as President of the Council, I will be in the forefront of leading the change we want in our public schools - I invite you to advocate with me on behalf of the children and families of New York State. If we don't, who will?

I wish each of you a successful conference and school year. Thank you.

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Acknowledgements:

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