



Cold Spring Harbor Central School District

The Francis Roberts Community Center

75 Goose Hill Road

Cold Spring Harbor, New York 11724-9813

Judith A. Wilansky, Ed.D.
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

(631) 367-5931
(631) 367-3108 (Fax)

February 23, 2009

Dear Community Member:

January was the most riveting month for television watching. We heard about the eroding economy, the woes on Wall Street and the budget crisis in Albany on a daily basis. Amidst all of the depressing economic news we experienced a couple of bright spots: one was the peaceful transition of one presidential administration to the next, and the other was a miracle that occurred on the Hudson River on the frigid afternoon of January 15th. That was the afternoon when US Airways Flight 1549, under the expert command of Captain Chesley Sullenberger, made an emergency landing in the Hudson River less than several minutes after takeoff. The maneuver is so rare and improbable that pilots are not even trained to perform such a feat.

We have learned so much about "Sully" since that historical landing. We have learned that he flew fighter jets in the Air Force, that he enjoys the art of glider flying and that he is a lifelong learner on the study of leadership and ethics. When asked what was going through his mind during that fateful 240 seconds, he responded that the situation at hand required every ounce of his focus and concentration. There was no time for calamitous thinking.

Recently, the local superintendents met with Senator Marcellino and he has asserted that it is unlikely that "low need" suburban schools will receive any relief with regard to State Aid. This is indeed a catastrophe for many of our Long Island school neighbors- they rely on State Aid to provide essential components of their instructional programs and, as such, they are anticipating massive layoffs in all areas of staffing. The students in those districts will ultimately bear the burden of these cuts. Cold Spring Harbor *will* be impacted from our loss of State Aid – at this time, we are anticipating a reduction of several hundred thousand dollars. Certainly, this is not good news.

But in light of this news, we have committed ourselves to examining every line item in the budget through the lens of how *essential* that expenditure is with regard to student learning. Our good fortune is that, even with an extremely lean budget, all of the aspects

of a strong learning environment will remain in place. High achieving schools have certain characteristics in common that are not always reflected in school budgets.

- High achieving schools have teachers who know and care about their students.
- High achieving schools have teachers that engage in dialogue around their instructional practices.
- High achieving schools have teachers who view themselves as learners and continually grow in their own knowledge.
- And, of course, there is very little that a school can achieve without the support of family and community – to provide an environment that values education and supports children's growth.

The most amazing aspect of the Flight 1549 story is that it seems unlikely that almost any other pilot could have accomplished such a safe landing. In fact, we have learned that due to technological innovation, many pilots lack the expertise to fly manually and that "autopilot" is more than an expression.

So, in flight and in education, it comes down to the people. It's about caring for students, connecting with students and challenging them to be the very best that they can be. Yes, the coming year will be fiscally challenging but we will not allow our diminished resources to interfere with the mission of our schools.

Sincerely,

Judith A. Wilansky

Judith A. Wilansky, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools