

“Committed to Making Dreams Come True”

I feel honored and very fortunate to welcome you back to the start of another school year; one that is filled with the promise for success, the potential for great accomplishments and full of opportunities to change the world. Over the past three years, we have achieved many great things together, starting as a new beginning; led to us to move from good to great and reaffirmed for all of us that success is our only option. The alternative to success for our students, their families and us is simply not an acceptable option.

Today, we embark upon a journey where we stand *“Committed to Making Dreams Come True.”* Walt Disney once had a dream; one which would ultimately touch the lives of millions of people across the world. All of his successes were born from the dreams of others as catalysts for his work that has touched all of our lives and the lives of all whom we know in some way. Just as Walt saw what others wanted and acted upon his vision, so must we act upon what we see and what we know intuitively to be what our children want for themselves, what other people want for their children and the joys and successes we want for ourselves and others.

As I reflect on our work over the years we have spent together as a district, it is obvious that we have achieved a multitude of things which have been spoken about and many that have not ever been spoken about. Among these many achievements lies what I believe to be those which have enhanced our district's capacity to change as is necessary to meet the demands of the single greatest enterprise in a contemporary society, that being public education. We have developed the ability to speak to each other in a manner which recognizes and respects each individual as an equal contributor to our work. We have developed relationships based on honesty, mutual respect and a genuine appreciation for one's individuality. We have learned to respect our strengths as well as where we need further development. "Our heritage and ideals, our code and standards - the things we live by and teach our children - are preserved or diminished by how freely we exchange ideas and feelings" (Walt Disney).

Just as we have built stronger relationships with each other, we have also built stronger, more meaningful relationships with the children whom we serve, their parents, and the communities that trust us with the development of their future generations. Third, and probably equally as important to our relationship building, we have refocused our energies on teaching and learning. We have revised curricula, obtained the necessary tools to implement it and have developed and implemented a professional development model that is proactive as opposed to reactive. Now, we must examine the instruction being provided to our students and make the necessary adjustments to ensure their success. Last and certainly not least, we have recaptured the energy and enthusiasm necessary for our children to receive the high quality instruction necessary for them to realize their dreams.

As I refreshed my memories about Walt Disney in preparation for my comments to you this morning, I could not help but draw the connection between his work and ours. Think about it this way. Walt had the dreams of others in mind with all that he did. So must we. He created places where children were able to see some of what had only once been in their dreams. So must we create these same types of places. He called what he created Disneyland and Disneyworld while we call our places schools. Disney said, "To all that come to this happy place: welcome. Disneyland is your land. Here age relives fond memories of the past, and here youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future. Disneyland is dedicated to the ideals, the dreams, and the hard work and sacrifices that

have created America... with hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world."

The work of Disney is a work in progress just as our work is ever-changing. Our schools, what we teach and how we teach must continue to evolve everyday if we wish to be successful in our stated purposes. Disney put it best when he referenced Disneyland as a place that would be forever growing. He said "It's something that will never be finished. Something that I can keep developing...and adding to" and "Disneyland will never be completed. It will continue to grow as long as there is imagination left in the world." Our schools must continue to grow for the sake of all of our children.

Our schools are places where children must be able to realize their dreams. Most importantly, they must be places where they are challenged academically, allowed to develop both socially and emotionally without fear and places where they will experience both success and challenge without being judged in any way. Our schools must continue to be places where risk-taking is not only allowed but is encouraged. The programs we offer to our children must be characterized by excellence, innovation and a true commitment to ensure learning takes place for all students. "The era we are living in today is a dream of coming true" (Walt Disney).

As I conclude my comments to you this morning, I want to keep sight of what really makes schools and school districts successful. Again in the words of Walt Disney I offer that "You can design and create, and build the most wonderful place in the world. But it takes people to make the dream a reality." We are a better district because of all of you. We have better schools because of you and what we have accomplished together. We will continue to meet and overcome the challenges of the future only if we maintain and expand upon the relationships we have today.

Just as Walt Disney had a dream, so must we. Dreams represent the endless possibilities that a high quality public education coupled with supportive families and communities may bring to children. These same dreams will make us laugh together, cry together while giving us the ability to see the world through rose colored glasses. I am forever optimistic about what we will achieve this year and for years to come.

May we embark on the journey of another school year filled with the realization that we really can make dreams come true. May we nurture and sustain each other and may we meet the needs of all of our students by sharing the responsibility for both their successes and failures. Thursday when we greet over 2,500 students, we will have another unique opportunity to shape the future.

Dream big, encourage others to dream big because others trust us to dream that way.

I, along with you, stand "*Committed to Making Dreams Come True.*"

A stylized, cursive signature of the name "Gary" in black ink.

Gary S. Mala
Superintendent of Schools
August 28, 2007