



Message from the Superintendent

June 21, 2018

Dear Parents and/or Guardians:

Thank you for those of you who were able to take our *Portrait of a Graduate* survey! We've found that 88% of respondents knew about the *Portrait of a Graduate*, 77% were familiar with the district's goals of communication and collaboration, and 77% felt the *Portrait of a Graduate* was essential or very important to the district's mission.

When surveyed in 2016 the overwhelming majority of parents, staff, and students listed "developing independent learners capable of personal and professional success," and "helping kids find and develop their passions" as the two most important things we valued for our children's education - in other words, the *Portrait of a Graduate*. This, coupled with the fact that we send our students to a progressive high school that places a premium on innovation as the key to helping students "pursue their passions and advance toward their future goals," reinforces the importance of this work.

Our work towards the *Portrait of a Graduate* should also include maintaining a rigorous approach to traditional academic subjects. For example, although there is always room for improvement, on the 2016-17 PARCC, 11/13 of River Vale's tested areas maintained or saw a significant increase in the percentage of students scoring a "5" on the test, the highest a student can score, including a 19% increase on the 8th grade Algebra I test from the previous year.

However, high-stakes standardized tests measure only a small sliver of what students need to learn, and are therefore limited in what they tell us about student achievement. In fact, Governor Murphy has asked the new Commissioner of Education "to end the failed experiment that has been PARCC testing and create new, more effective and less class time-intrusive means for measuring student assessment." This means New Jersey might have its fifth different standardized test over the past five years when considering math, science, and English Language Arts.

It is not in the best interests of our students to over-emphasize tests that are controversial and keep changing, nor pay too much credence to website and magazine rankings, which use inaccurate or outdated information. If we believe in the *Portrait of a Graduate*, then we need to believe in a more sophisticated definition of student achievement, worthy of what young people will truly need to succeed in the future.

Our school district will continue to be a trendsetter because we believe in preparing children for the world in front of them, not the one behind them.

Thank you so much again for your partnership and support of our schools. I hope you and your families have an enjoyable summer, are able to spend quality time together, and can relax and recharge as we look forward to the next school-year!

Sincerely,

Rory McCourt, Superintendent of Schools