

August 24, 2006

Seeking a better world through education

by Debra Bowers Ph.D, Superintendent, St. Louis Park Public Schools

There's a back-to-school excitement in the air as we look forward to another great year of student achievement. School begins on Tuesday, September 5 for students in grades one through twelve and Thursday, September 7 for kindergartners.

We're proud of the many stories of success throughout our district. Our senior high is recognized as one of the top 500 high schools in America by *Newsweek* magazine. Our ninth-grade transition program was recently highlighted by the Minnesota Department of Education in its *Blueprints: Redesigning Minnesota High Schools for the 21st Century* bulletin.

We have an exemplary staff working with students this year. Among them are: preschool teacher Beth Shannon, named Brooklyn Park Walmart Teacher of the Year; Peter Hobart second grade teacher Debbie Strand, named St. Louis Park Sam's Club Teacher of the Year, and Park Spanish Immersion fifth and sixth grade English language arts teacher Lee-Ann Stephens, named 2006 Minnesota Teacher of the Year.

We in the educational system must do the best job we can in creating innovators and people who can think globally. Gary Marx, a leading expert on future trends has identified international learning as one of the top sixteen trends that will profoundly impact education, explaining, "As nations vie for understanding and respect in an interdependent world, international learning, including diplomatic skills, will become basic."

We are now in the process of bringing the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (PYP) to St. Louis Park Public Schools. PYP will help students examine local issues through an international lens, comparing and contrasting viewpoints, and learning to be better world citizens.

With School Board approval, we're moving forward with our application process for PYP at Aquila and Peter Hobart Primary Centers and we plan to seek Board approval for PYP at Cedar Manor and Susan Lindgren Intermediate Centers.

"PYP seeks to develop students who are inquirers, thinkers, communicators, risk takers, knowledgeable, principled, caring, open minded, well-balanced and reflective; in short, St. Louis Park students," Peter Hobart Principal Frank Johnson told board members. "In my opinion, PYP is about what Peter Hobart is already about. It's about excellence for all students. In addition, it makes us part of a terrific international network and brings our students a world language."

Over the past year, teachers, staff and community members have collaborated to develop lesson plans that fit with PYP. Part-time coordinators have been hired to guide PYP

development and implementation. Approximately 70 staff members have completed one or two of three levels of training. And, after a thorough and intense study of multiple languages, including a survey of elementary families, Spanish has emerged as our world language component.

We will begin implementation of PYP this fall with sampler classes in Spanish language for students in grades two and three. Students in kindergarten through grade three will participate in at least one six-week unit of PYP curriculum this year.

We are currently developing curriculum for kindergarten through sixth grade and plan to implement Spanish language classes for kindergarten through sixth grade beginning in the fall of 2007. The district's long-term vision includes an International Baccalaureate option at the junior high as well.

In the end, everything new that we are developing for our students focuses on four basic principles of educational excellence that we have always adhered to: excellent teachers, strong leadership within each school, professional development at every level, and parent involvement. PYP standardizes these components in an internationally recognized framework.

We're excited to be partnering with the entire St. Louis Park community in joining others across the globe who are seeking to create a better world through education. Visit us at www.slpschools.org to learn more about PYP.