

CONCORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Fabian Fondriest - Chair
Annual Town Report - 2009

Our administration, staff and teachers had an outstanding 2009. In one of the most difficult economic environments any of us has faced, they maintained the highest academic standards, expanded extra-curricular offerings to engage more students, completed a new school building on time and under budget, and delivered a 0% increase budget for 2010-11 that sustains the quality of our K-8 program.

The first accomplishment, maintaining the highest academic standards, requires a constant focus on student learning, as well as a willingness to ask how we can make something that's already good even better. Throughout the year, many issues come up that could distract this focus, but with superb leadership from Superintendent Diana Rigby, our teachers, staff and administration address the issues as needed, while never losing focus on student learning. The results are there for all to see. Whether measured by standardized tests, third-party assessments, academic competitions, or other comparisons, the Concord Public School (CPS) system consistently ranks as one of the best in the state. We can all take pride in the quality of our school system.

To strengthen student learning, we believe it is critical to have our students become engaged learners—both inside and outside the classroom. Engaging students outside the classroom is particularly important in the middle school years. We want to respond to their broadening interests and we also want to give each student a chance to connect with others in middle school. CPS therefore continued to expand our extra-curricular offerings in 2009, and today, more than 65% of middle school students are involved in an extra-curricular activity.

In 2009, we celebrated another 8th grade completing Middle School. We can be confident that our K-8 program has prepared these students well for the academic rigor of our high school, and has made them eager to pursue the even broader range of extra-curricular programs offered at CCHS.

The third accomplishment—completing the new Willard on time and under budget—stands as a testament to our town's commitment to sustaining an excellent school system. Many people across our community had a direct hand in this success, from the Concord citizens on the original building committee in 2004 to the teachers incorporating instruction about the “green” construction process into their 2009 curriculum, and everyone in between. Our sincere thanks to all.

The new Willard completed a decade of rebuilding our three elementary schools: a new Alcott in 2004, a new Thoreau in 2006, and a new Willard in 2009. We look forward to decades of young students becoming engaged learners in these wonderful buildings.

Our building focus has now shifted to the high school. The needs there are well-documented and substantial. As we did with the elementary schools, we have started by drawing on the expertise in the Concord community: the School Committee recently charged a new committee, including several Concord citizens, to work with a design firm to develop alternative approaches to address the high school needs.

At the same time, we must maintain the functionality of our middle school buildings, since those buildings will likely not see any major renovations in the foreseeable future. We are therefore making measured capital investments each year to keep the buildings in good condition. For example, in 2009 we completed the replacement of all the windows in both buildings. This has already had a favorable impact on our heating costs.

The fourth accomplishment—delivering a 0% increase budget for 2010-11 that sustains the quality of our K-8 program—is especially gratifying to report. 2009 brought financial challenges

that will likely affect our schools for several years. Fortunately, our administration had been taking steps well before 2009 to control expense growth. For example, we have pursued a strategy of developing more in-house SPED programs to reduce our dependence on expensive out-sourced programs. This shift has meaningfully reduced the rate of growth of SPED expenses.

CPS also successfully negotiated a new three-year contract with the Concord Teachers Association (CTA) in 2009. These negotiations took place while the economic news from the state was bouncing between bad and uncertain. Nonetheless, both sides worked through the issues in a productive manner over several months and importantly, reached agreement prior to the start of the 2009-10 school year.

Through this combination of skillful long-term expense planning, successful contract negotiations, and other actions, our administration has responded directly and effectively to the economic downturn: in the coming year, they will maintain our top-performing school system with no budget increase.

The School Committee appreciates the work, dedication, and skills of our administration, teachers, and staff, and we applaud them for their accomplishments in 2009. We are always grateful to all the residents of Concord for their commitment and active support of our schools. We also want to thank the Concord Education Fund for its significant contributions to enriching our students' experience. Together, we are all stewards of an excellent school system, and as good stewards do, we all strive to leave this school system even better than we found it. We made good progress on that in 2009.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Concord School Committee
Fabian Fondriest – Chair
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