



# *The Communicator*

October 19, 2006

An official communication from the Superintendent's Office

## *SPECIAL EDITION*

### **Superintendent's Message**

October 18, 2006 was a test for the Allentown School District and the City of Allentown. It was the test of our collaboration, given an incident the magnitude of the bomb threat for ALL schools in the District. I want to thank the administrators, teachers and support staff who kept the safety of students first and foremost. I also want to thank our principals, security personnel, maintenance, custodial and other staff who completed searches of the schools as they are the ones who recognize the unusual changes, those items that are out of place. Thank you to the City of Allentown Fire and Police Departments, who worked side by side with us from their initial alert to being with our staff, who conducted searches at William Allen High School and Louis E. Dieruff High School. The Bomb Squad immediately came to Raub Middle School and examined the book bag that was out of place. Upon the all clear, the staff and students were able to enter the building and begin their work for the day.

Finally I want to thank Mayor Ed Pawlowski for working with me to arrange the press conference with key participants: District Attorney James Martin, Fire Department Chief Scott Lindenmuth and Assistant Police Chief David Howells. The key talking points of that press conference were:

- The City and District worked as a team and effectively and efficiently addressed the bomb threats so that our students and staff could return to the schools.
- We do not find it acceptable for anyone to impose harm to the schools through threats.
- The Allentown School District will cooperate fully with the City and the District Attorney and will expect the perpetrator to be prosecuted to the fullest extent possible.
- Finally, the Allentown School District is making progress in addressing student achievement. We are committed to the safety of our 18,500 students and 2200 staff. We are concerned that there are individuals in the City that are attempting to interrupt the education of our students and to hold the District hostage. We consider that totally unacceptable and will work with the City and the District Attorney to having a climate in which safety is restored in our City. Such actions will positively impact the Allentown School District.

I would like to share with you our on-line op-ed., one that was prepared for this very week, a week that was to be emphasized community-wide. The focus was to be on anti-violence. We bring to you our focus on the strategies, actions and plans that are in place to address security and supervision in our schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Karen S. Angello'.

Karen S. Angello, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools

## **Comprehensive School Safety: Requires the Work of the Entire Community**

Becoming the Superintendent of the Allentown School District in 2002 has been one of the most important assignments in my professional career. From day one, I have been impressed with an apparent strength of the District: how ASD staff and faculty wrap around the students to ensure that they not only make academic gains, but that they make those gains in a safe environment. Bullying prevention training and programming, and both lockdown and evacuation procedures are in place. Precautions are taken when children are entering or exiting in the morning and the afternoons. We are committed to continuing this quest for safety and security in our schools, as our students truly need all of us to care.

The ASD Board of Directors supported stricter enforcement of cell phone usage in this school year by disallowing use during the instructional time. The stricter guidelines have brought some displeasure, but the parents and students who have come forward asking us to continue our strict enforcement have been greatly appreciated. We know that this effort is only one part of the equation for a safe learning environment. Every year we must revisit our safety plans and protocols; this school year it is even more important with an increase in enrollment of an additional 405 students.

We remain vigilant. In this week dedicated to safety and non-violence, I would like to share several other measures that have been taken:

- Five elementary assistant principals have been hired for increased supervision and instructional support in schools with high enrollments.
- Two additional elementary counselors and one psychologist have been hired to provide additional support.
- Security has been bolstered at the middle and high schools, and security officers have been appointed for 7 elementary schools. Additional security equipment is being procured through grant funding.
- We have expanded the VISTA II and VISTA III Alternative Education programs.
- The ASD Board of Directors is implementing Phase I of the Comprehensive Facility Plan to increase classroom space at the William Allen and Dieruff High Schools, Trexler and South Mountain Middle Schools, and Roosevelt and Jackson Elementary sites.
- Modularity has allowed us to increase classroom space at Roosevelt, Mosser, Muhlenberg, Midway Manor and Union Terrace.
- Efforts have been taken to decrease class size in very crowded schools having limited or no additional space. Although the facilities plan implementation is underway, the immediate crowded conditions have required us to make decisions that have impacted our families by having to move students from three of the neighborhood schools.
- Emergency operating procedures, based on the guidelines of the Federal Departments of Education and Justice and developed in conjunction with the City of Allentown and the Lehigh County Emergency Management Services, allow for immediate inspections of all district schools and safe entries into buildings, when we need to employ them.

Our principals and central administrative team implemented a revised Code of Conduct at the start of the school year and have been committed to consistent follow-through in every aspect of its implementation. We will be going through updated gang awareness and de-escalation training. In addition, we continue to revisit our emergency preparedness protocols, as we can never be complacent.

Recently I convened a meeting with the high school principals, central administrative staff and representatives from the Allentown Police Department and Lehigh County Probation. We shared our concerns regarding truancy and the need to continuously collaborate, and to enlist the help of our community in expecting all school-aged students to be in school. If you see students congregating in the community during the school day, please call the Allentown Police Department and apprise them. We must give out the message that school is where our students belong. It is important for all magistrates to strictly and consistently enforce the laws so that students may not manipulate any part of the system. We want our students to be successful, educated citizens. It will take the entire community to be involved. Helping our students be responsible is a bold statement on our part that we deeply care for them and their future. It requires a spirit of cooperation and a shared responsibility for their future.

I look forward to sharing an overview of our comprehensive approach to advancing student achievement in the weeks ahead as that is the other significant part of the equation to student success. Our goal-directed Board of Directors, business and foundation partners, parents and our committed administrators, faculty and staff are very focused on our students' future. We are strengthening many system-wide efforts this year. The Allentown School District remains an important part of the fabric of the greater Lehigh Valley. We are committed to making a positive difference for our students. Please join us in that effort.

Karen S. Angello, Ph.D.  
Superintendent of Schools