

FROM SUSAN MARKS

Norwalk Public Schools • Norwalk, CT
Norwalkps.org



Competing in the 21st Century

Dear Norwalk Families,

We had a very good school opening and I hope that your children made a good transition back to school. Our students are among the 56 million children returning to the nation's 133,000 elementary and secondary schools. Our enrollment this year is just over 11,000 students. I hope that you will be able to attend the *School Open Houses* to meet our teachers and support staff who work hard every day to ensure that your children are learning at high levels. I had the privilege of visiting all the schools during the opening week of school and observed students in classes, and observed many caring staff who work hard on behalf of your students.

In the past, we talked about the 3 "Rs"; reading, writing and arithmetic. Today, literacy includes reading and writing, and numeracy includes the mathematical knowledge that students will need to compete in the 21st century. However, there are really a new 4 "Rs" for the 21st century. These are rigor, relationships, relevance, and results. Let me define these terms.

Ever since I came to Norwalk, I have talked about the importance of raising the rigor in our classrooms. It is important that our students are challenged in their classes. As we review the curriculum of the district and revise it to meet the National Core Curriculum, students should be challenged at every level.

By *Rigor*, I mean that students will be expected to take high level courses in middle school and high school. All students should be engaged and motivated to learn at high levels. This means that there is the ability for all students to have access to accelerated pathways with the target being college readiness. The curriculum becomes rigorous when students are pushed not only to know information but also to apply and demonstrate their understanding of that information. Rigor uses knowledge acquisition, inquiry, problem solving, communication, and reflection to stimulate student thinking, and then holds each student to his or her fullest potential.

The 4 "Rs" for the 21st century

- Rigor
- Relationships
- Relevance
- Results

Relationships means that our principals, teachers and support staff provide, personalized learning environments for all students. When you go into classrooms, you would see teachers and support staff working with small groups and individual students. Teams of teachers work together to provide students with academic and social guidance. This means that teachers have high expectations for every student and will do whatever they can to ensure that students learn at high levels. It is about teaching and learning.

Relevance means that learning must have meaning every day. Our curriculum needs to engage students by utilizing technology, current events, personal backgrounds, and historical significance while focusing on twenty-first-century skills. We want to build curriculum where the content is engaging and interesting.

And finally, there is a focus on *results* of student learning using multiple indicators so our teachers can adjust their practices and our schools can offer personalized support to students. The results are not just related to state testing, but on high level indicators related to a trajectory of achievement with high level targets set in elementary, middle and high school. Looking at student work and basing lessons on what students are learning is the key to ensuring that students will be progressing in their school work.

Building a *World Class* school system doesn't occur over night. It takes teams of people working together to create high functioning teams with our students at the core. We have had a good start to the school year and we will continue to work on behalf of every student in our district.

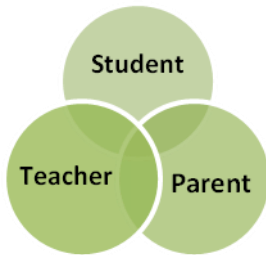
Sincerely,

Susan F. Marks
Superintendent of Schools.

FROM SUSAN MARKS



What Parents Can Do to Support their Children



It is important that you communicate to your child that being challenged in school will help them get ready to go to college. Talk to your child about the importance of doing their best in school, and being in high level courses. Your relationship with your child's teacher is important in helping your child be successful. It is extremely important that as parents, we monitor how our children are doing in school. Here are some questions that are important to ask your child's teachers:

- Is my child reading on grade level? Can you show me books that are the right level of difficulty for my child and recommend books that he or she might enjoy?
- How is my child doing in math? Does my child have the opportunity to take the challenge items? Are there areas that need improvement? How can I help my child at home?
- Does my child have the opportunity to do work above his or her grade level?
- What are the requirements for doing well in your class, and how do you assess how my child is doing? Can you show me examples of high-quality student work?
- How much time should my child be spending on homework?
- Aside from report cards, what are the best ways to keep up to date on my child's progress?
- If my child is struggling, what support can the school offer my child? What can I do at home to help my child do better in school?
- If my child is achieving above grade level, what extra enrichment or support might benefit my child? How can I help my child at home?

What Students Can Do to Become a Responsible Student

Being successful in school means that students have certain responsibilities.

Here are some ideas that all students can do to be a successful student.

- Attend school every day and come to school on time every day
- Get enough sleep
- Develop good study habits
- Have a regular homework time and get organized so you don't miss your assignments
- Read every day
- Study and earn good grades
- Ask yourself and your teachers what would put you on the path to take rigorous courses
- Take advantage of the resources in your school, such as homework clubs, mentoring, tutoring and so on.
- When you have questions or need help, talk to your teachers or school counselors
- Challenge yourself to do your best in school every day

