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December 2018

Dear Parents/Guardians, Staff and Yonkers Community,

With the holiday season upon us and 2018 ending, we take this opportunity to pause, reflect, and be grateful for the collaborative efforts and accomplishments of the Yonkers Public Schools. We acknowledge at the same time the challenges we confront as a Board of Education and as a school district that serves almost 27,000 students in 39 schools. Nevertheless, the Trustees of the Yonkers Board of Education and I embrace this time and **extend our thanks to each of you!**

With you, we celebrate **schools' progress in student achievement and engagement**. Their success is indicative of a strong and dynamic academic, emotional and social foundation our *educators* and partners build for all students from prekindergarten through graduation. The **results** are clear:

- Students in grades 3 through 8 demonstrate **steady improvement on English Language Arts and Mathematics** assessments, **attaining the second highest scores of the State's large cities** on both assessments.
- **New instructional methodologies and classes are available for bilingual students** and for those in English as a New Language.
- **Additional classes for students with disabilities, expanded our in-district Autism Program** and increased pupil support services.
- New York **State Education Commissioner, MaryEllen Elia, applauded Yonkers as a leader in educational technology**, for its innovative decision to adopt district wide Computer Based Testing (CBT) in both content areas.
- In 2017 and 2018, we point to an **on-time 86% graduation rate higher than the State's average**, and the first Big 5 City School District to exceed an 80% graduation rate.
- **High school students are offered an increasing number of college-link courses and Career and Technical Education preparation**, earning numerous honors and Advanced Designation Diplomas. Students taking **International Baccalaureate** courses has doubled.
- In June 2018, **for the first time in 35 years**, two ceremonies were required for the 978 students in grades 10 through 12 who qualified, with grade point average of 90 and above, for the Annual Superintendent's Club 90 Academic Achievement Awards.
- **Our Community Schools offer health clinics, dental and social services** at seven schools supported by local hospitals and providers.
- This year, **there is no charge for breakfast and lunch in the cafeteria daily for all students** through the Community Eligibility Provision, along with the State's No Shaming Initiative - *Grab and Go Breakfast Service*.

- Our newly merged football teams, **through a partnership with the Yonkers Police and Firefighters, resulted in a great first season**, which culminated in the exciting Friday Night Lights game.
- **Yonkers Public Schools suspension rate is lower than most New York large city schools** was validated in the recently released report from the New York Equity Coalition, *Stolen Time - New York State's Suspension Crisis*.

These accomplishments-- **and many others**-- are possible in partnership with you, community-based organizations, local colleges/universities, and City government leaders. This spirit of unity and these action steps are modeled by the bold, passionate leadership of Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Edwin M. Quezada, who advocates for quality schools and high standards of teaching and learning. He is assisted by his **diverse, collaborative administrative team of instructional and non-instructional managers, outstanding school administrators, efficient support and civil service staff and, most important, extraordinary classroom teachers**.

We are grateful to each of them, for their part in creating a system we can acknowledge with pride! National, state and local attention is growing for our school district. For instance, the Yonkers My Brother's Keeper (MBK) movement is flourishing and is considered a model in New York State and nationally. In September, **500 attendees affirmed their support for this movement at the second Yonkers MBK Gala**. Yonkers Basics, which addresses MBK Milestone 1, is committed to prepare children, from birth to age three—a time when 80% of brain growth occurs—to enter school ready to learn. This program is a regional leader of the national The Basics campaign.

There is much more to be done. *Rebuild Yonkers Schools*, a 13-year, 4- phase capital improvement plan to repair and rebuild the school district's 39 schools is moving ahead. **Mayor Spano, our State delegation, the Yonkers Council of PTAs/PTSAs and the Trustees have championed this much needed plan. It will benefit thousands of future generation students who will be educated in modern, healthy learning environments.** Of course, **safety and security are forefront** and we are augmenting our safety and security equipment as well as our collaborative efforts with City agencies and response teams.

All these achievements emerge against the **backdrop of challenges** – some predictable and some unpredictable, within the first three months of this school year. **Many thanks to the parents and to each person** who helped with the unexpected occurrence on September 24th, when we had to close Paideia School 15 due to a roof failure that resulted in areas of mold. Similarly, on November 15th, an afternoon snow storm, inaccurately predicted, paralyzed the entire region significantly impacting student dismissal. With cooperation and support from our employees and City agencies, **the challenge was addressed with care for our children**. In each of these instances, the Superintendent and his team reassess their work to improve procedures, to revise emergency response plans and to update any plan that requires a revision. Last, but not least, **the annual budget is a predictable challenge**.

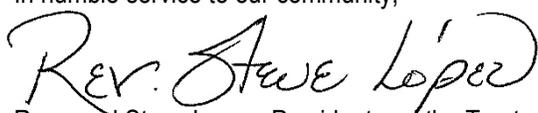
We began this school year with a balanced budget of \$615 million through the resolve of our advocates and partners, to ensure there would be no negative impact on student services and staffing. **There have been no layoffs for the past two years.** To accomplish this goal, the Trustees approved the use of the Yonkers Public Schools entire fund balance of \$24 million, limiting the District's ability to fund unexpected emergencies. In support, our elected officials in Albany designated \$8.8 million in *Bullet Aid* to the Board of Education.

Nevertheless, our students thrive because of the hard work, creativity, and dedication of the Yonkers Public Schools learning community. **Again, we appreciate, more than this letter can contain, our administrators, teachers, civil service staff, students, parent/guardians and community partners.**

We, the Trustees, offer this information to continue the open dialogue and transparency about our policies and the work of the Superintendent of Schools and his administrative team. We are and will continue to be available to the entire community. Join us at committee meetings where your input and suggestions are always welcome. Visit our website and social media for more details and success stories.

The Trustees look forward to working with you in the New Year and hope you enjoy this holiday season with your friends and loved ones.

In humble service to our community,



Reverend Steve Lopez, President and the Trustees of the Yonkers Board of Education