

**Putnam
Northern
Westchester
C.S.A.**

CHIEF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS ASSOCIATION
Putnam/Northern Westchester Counties
200 BOCES Drive, Yorktown Heights, NY 10598-4399
(914) 248-2303

***PARTICIPATING
SCHOOL DISTRICTS***

On the Eve of the Inauguration—

***Bedford
Brewster
Briarcliff
Carmel
Chappaqua
Croton-Harmon
Garrison
Haldane
Hendrick Hudson
Katonah-Lewisboro
Lakeland
Mahopac
North Salem
Ossining
Peekskill
Putnam Valley
Somers
Yorktown***

President-elect Barack Obama's journey to the White House offered amazing opportunities to engage students in what essentially was a "teachable moment". As superintendents of the eighteen districts that comprise the Putnam Northern Westchester BOCES region, we took notice of how important this election was to our students. Our educational goals for all children include the development of character that inspires the furthering of our democratic ideals and furthers the engagement of our youth in civic life.

During this election period, throughout the halls and classrooms of our schools we witnessed heightened interest in the workings of government and the voting process. Students focused on the issues of public engagement, citizenship and activism-getting involved. They came to realize the potential within each of us to influence the moral fiber of our nation and to understand the importance of casting a vote-an action that many Americans have given their lives for over the past two centuries. As educational leaders we strive to harness that energy and vitality to meet the challenges that exist in this turbulent environment. That interest and excitement have led our local districts to plan lessons around the historic significance of this inaugural address. We expect our faculties and our students to witness live television broadcasts of the event. Now we prepare to share our beliefs and hopes for public education with the incoming administration. We look to our new President to set high standards and inspire all of us to reach them.

In the next few weeks our nation will celebrate three historic days. They are January 19, (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday), January 20, (inauguration of Barak Obama as 44th President of the United States) and February 12, 2009 (the 200th anniversary of the birthday of Abraham Lincoln). The themes and mission of each of these men are interrelated; all three speak to our mission of equity and excellence on behalf of all of our children.

This is a very difficult time for public education. The system for funding public schools is broken and unless it is fixed we will send into the adult world two tiers of educated students who will be distinguished by the level of local fiscal resources available to support their educational needs and aspirations. In the 1950s and 60s, the right to a free and equal education took center stage and remains there today. We recognize that an educated workforce remains the backbone of a vibrant economy.

***Judith Johnson
President***

***Robert J. Reidy, Jr.
Vice President***

***Thomas Higgins, Jr.
Treasurer***

The Superintendents of PNW/BOCES believe that a good education is the passport to individual success as well as the critical factor in the ultimate revival of our nation's economic well-being and international leadership. We retain a deep optimism about our nation's future, the same optimism that we must communicate to our students. We also know that America's strength, courage and resilience have always triumphed in the worst of times. This could be our "Sputnik Moment".

In a resolution passed by the Superintendents and their Boards of Education in the Putnam-Northern Westchester BOCES region, we acknowledged education as the basic civil right of all Americans and pledged to uphold the rights of all students to an education that would ensure their full participation in a global community. It is this message we share with President-elect Obama. The concept of education as a civil right infers a commitment to building school communities that embrace diversity and move well beyond tolerance to acceptance and celebration of differences. This commitment is grounded in a view of America that is generous and supportive of those who struggle to find their way.

Within our schools there is a spirit of optimism and excitement about the changes before us. We can only imagine how proud Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Abraham Lincoln would be if they were here to see our young people witness the inauguration of Barack Obama. Dr. King would likely tell the young people, "If you wish, you, too, can become the President of the United States. Of course, you will need to work hard, get a good education, and demonstrate that you are a thoughtful and contributing citizen."

Our schools are full of youthful enthusiasm – young people full of life, anxious to become all that they can be. Our schools are filled with educators who believe in the promise of our young people and press our students to fulfill their dreams. And we all know our schools are filled with the future leaders of our nation. It is in the eyes and potential of our young people that we find optimism.

In the spirit of hope and optimism, we have adopted a position statement entitled *Education Is a Civil Right*. You may find that statement on the web site of each district or at www.pnwboces.org. You will find that the statement declares our optimism and hope for a more perfect union as we work our way through these turbulent times.

Judith Johnson- President for Chief School Administrators Association for the 18 districts in the Putnam Northern Westchester BOCES region.