

February 11, 2008

Dear RB Parents, Students, Staff, Community Members and Supporters:

I am pleased to announce that Riverside Brookfield High School has met its academic performance goals for the 2006-2007 school year. Performance information for the 2007-2008 school year will not be available until late summer 2008. There is more detailed information about RB's students' academic performance in our school report card.

As a Professional Learning Community, RB sets S.M.A.R.T. (specific-measurable-attainable-realistic-time bound) goals as a means of charting progress. While these goals do not encompass all that we desire to achieve, they have been a powerful force in improving student success and institutional excellence. Our three primary academic S.M.A.R.T. goals have remained the same for the past six years. These goals have been ratified by the Board of Education and the administration and faculty. The three academic goals focus on RB's graduation rate, our students' performance on the federal and state mandated Prairie State Achievement Exam (which includes the A.C.T.), and our students' performance and participation in regards to the Advanced Placement program.

From 1991 through 2001, Riverside Brookfield High School had an average graduation rate of 91%. Our goal is to maintain a graduation rate of 95% or higher. In 2004 and 2006, our graduation rate was 99% including a 100% graduation rate for Hispanic and African-American students in 2006. In 2007 our graduation rate was 97.4%. There were three special education students who were never expected to graduate with their class, so if they are not included in the calculation, RB's graduation rate would be 98.4%. Through a coordinated effort involving all members of our school community, we have been able to achieve these results.

Our school's performance on the P.S.A.E. improved for 2007 and met our S.M.A.R.T. goal criteria. Scores on Math and Science improved, while the Reading score was down slightly. Our overall pass rate showed an increase from the previous year and placed RB in the top 7% of schools statewide. Our A.C.T. score was also the highest since the inception of the P.S.A.E. which mandates that all students are required to complete this exam. The state reinstated a Writing exam in 2007, and RB's performance here was outstanding. This exam was passed by 84% of the students, which placed RB in the top 3% of schools in Illinois in this category. While we are proud of these achievements, we are completely dedicated to continuous improvement. We will expect improved overall performance for our Hispanic students and an overall school score increase for 2008.

RB continues to be a state and national leader in student performance on Advanced Placement exams. *Newsweek* once again rated RB in the top 1% of high schools in America. In 2006, RB ranked 76th in the nation, and in 2007 we were down slightly in this ranking to 116 out of over 18,000 schools nationwide. However, 2007 was the year where we had an increase in the pass rate, a record number of students taking and passing A.P. exams, and a record number of A.P. scholars. RB also ranks in the top 1% in the nation when it comes to the number of A.P. scholars as a percentage of graduates (126 A.P. scholars in 2007 and a graduating class of 360). RB also ranked 2nd out of 650 high schools in Illinois according to *Newsweek*.

At times the *Newsweek* Challenge Index has come under fire because the percentage of students passing exams is not part of the formula. RB has adjusted the rankings by recalculating our index score to edit out students participating to the point where our school had a pass rate matching the top achieving schools in the state (we used a 85% pass rate). With this adjusted rating, RB still ranked in the top 7 schools in Illinois. The Advanced Placement performance data is not the be all and end all. However, it is one way to quantifiably measure how well we are challenging our students and how well they are performing on the most rigorous and recognized set of exams in America.

Our final S.M.A.R.T. goal is related to finances and is measured by using a tool developed by the Illinois State Board of Education. After receiving the highest category rating five years in a row, RB dropped to the Financial Watch category in 2007. This is a result of several factors. First, RB's enrollment has grown by over 40% since our last referendum seven years ago. This significant enrollment growth has in no way been matched by revenue increases. With average enrollments gains of over 6% each year, RB has been limited to tax cap revenue increases of just under 3%. Even after significant decreases in most areas of expenditures, we can not maintain a balanced budget with reasonable annual cost of living increases of 4-5% coupled with enrollment increases of 6% when our revenue stream is growing at an average rate of 3%.

In addition to this formidable challenge, we have also had to give back over \$2 million in property tax rebates to commercial taxpayers in our district that were completely unanticipated. RB has made significant cuts in spending, and we have held our per pupil expenditures even. When an annual cost of living is factored into the equation, we are actually spending less per pupil than at any time in at least the last 15 years.

RB will continue to provide excellence in education while being fiscally responsible, but an operating fund referendum will be needed in the next two years to keep our school and community strong.

We have also committed ourselves to a Professional Learning Community goal and to making our high school a leader in environmental and conservation efforts.

RB continues to believe that "Good is the enemy of Great." Our dedication to continuous improvement is most sincere. We appreciate the tremendous support we receive from our community and parents. We also value the student-centered leadership of our Board of Education, the tremendous compassion and talent of our teaching staff, and the wonderful privilege of working with the best student body anywhere. We will be relentless in our effort to create an atmosphere of educational excellence for all students, and we are most proud of Riverside Brookfield High School.

Sincerely,

Jack Baldermann
Superintendent and Principal