Greetings,

So this was a short, but fantastic week for me here in South Country! I started the week at the National Forum for School Superintendents in Atlanta, Georgia. Actually, speaking to superintendents from states as different as Mississippi, Texas, and even Washington was pretty interesting. As different as our systems may be, there was so much commonality in the challenges we face as public school districts. I engaged in workshops on mental health, student decorum, and building capacity to show gains in student achievement. It was a lot to process, but ultimately a great experience and opportunity to appreciate different perspectives.

While I arrived back to district only on Wednesday, in just the last three days I was able to participate in so many great things. On my first day back, I attended our varsity basketball playoff game and though the Clippers were not victorious, the atmosphere was incredible with so many people coming out to support the team. Credit goes to the team for an excellent season. Our girls varsity wrestling team was also crowned the first ever state champions in their tournament in Albany! Amazing! Wednesday night's Board meeting featured the South Country Singers and they did their thing! So much talent! It really was great start to the meeting, as was acknowledging Jackie O'Hagan who was selected as this year's Social Studies Administrator of the Year! Additionally, Thursday I got to read "I am an American" to middle school students and that too was a fantastic experience. It was amazing to see students show so much pride in their respective backgrounds and in my group alone, I believe11 countries were represented by the students who listened so attentively to the book. That same evening I stopped by our first ever STEM Night hosted at Brookhaven Elementary School and the gymnasium was full of kids and families engaging enthusiastically in activities with robots, gadgets, and circuit boards - all with the help of teachers from our K-5 buildings as well as high school students who enthusiastically worked alongside our younger learners. I then stopped by the Junior College Planning Night at Bellport High School and saw our guidance department provide an informative presentation for parents regarding the college application process. So much Clipper PRIDE!

Wait, there's more: This morning I was literally brought to tears at the high school's Black History Month Assembly. And it was not just me, there were several in attendance that were literally crying at the student directed program under the advisement of Mr. Green and the Multicultural Club. The performances were moving as was the tribute to John Conquest who was so instrumental in mending racial tensions right here in Bellport, along with being a role model and father figure for so many in our community. Celebrating Black History Month is essential for recognizing the contributions, resilience, and achievements of Black individuals throughout history. It promotes awareness, fosters inclusivity, and encourages dialogue about past injustices and ongoing struggles. It was nice to see observances in all of our buildings! By honoring Black history, we inspire future generations and affirm the importance of diversity and equity in society. This morning I believe our students accomplished just that, with the support of all of the students in the audience. It really was moving and again, a huge source of Clipper PRIDE!

Finally, today was Beth Doyle's last day in our district. I can't begin to express how appreciative I am for everything she's done to push the district forward. I feel privileged to have worked with her and have learned so much. Besides her expertise with curriculum, she really impacted South Country by promoting character education, equity, and a sense of belonging for all of our stakeholders. She was also instrumental in acquiring grants to support our programs and in developing policies to best support our students. So many of us have embraced both the importance of filling our cups and finding our north star. And that, we owe to her. Please join me in wishing her well as she assumes her new role as Superintendent of Schools for the Greenport Union Free School District. They are lucky to have her. She too is a source of Clipper PRIDE.

Thanks to everyone, in every building and office, for doing their part to make South Country such an amazing place and for continuing to maintain such a positive climate for our students and staff. As always, it's a real privilege serving this community as your superintendent of schools.

Tony Santana

#clipper**PRIDE**