

Greetings,

This morning I had the good fortune of attending a superintendent's meeting at Lieutenant Michael P. Murphy Navy SEAL Museum in Sayville. I never knew the museum existed and it really never hit me that Lieutenant Murphy, whose story is featured in the book and subsequent movie *Lone Survivor*, attended the Patchogue Medford School District and had ties to our local community. If you haven't checked it out, I definitely recommend a visit and even taking students to see the space and perhaps have a tour with an actual Navy SEAL.

What struck me the most about the veterans that spoke to us was their sense of sacrifice, hard work, and their working towards things that serve the greater good, above and beyond themselves. It was a mindset and ethic they wished schools instilled in their students, not with the objective of promoting military service, but rather good citizenship and community. In addition to teaching children that life is in fact full of adversity and what matters is how you respond. I couldn't agree more and given how much we've strived to create comfortable environments and safe spaces for our students, I can't help but ponder whether or not it's to the detriment of our learners and ultimately our society. This can also simply be a reflection of my being a Generation X'er who was basically programmed to work hard and push through. Complaining, after all, gets you nothing.

I also think that this is all as simple as it is complicated - thus, it's really difficult to land in a place where there is a clear path ahead. What is clear is that there needs to be a balance between teaching grit and perseverance, along with providing a nurturing and supportive environment. Not to mention instilling a sense of accountability and understanding that choices have consequences, good and bad. What's important is that we reflect on the role we play in the choices we make, rather than look to all of the external factors that may have influenced our decision making. Just food for thought and I very much look forward to continuing this conversation as we navigate the school year ahead.

Speaking of hard work and sacrifice, this past week was Board of Education Appreciation Week and I'd like to take a moment to express my sincere gratitude to our Board of Education. Serving on the board requires time, commitment, and yes, sacrifice. I certainly don't take for granted that trustees actually volunteer their time for the betterment of the school district, including handling difficult decisions, balancing various needs, and navigating challenges with our students' best interests always in mind. Their efforts, often behind the scenes, play a critical role in shaping the

future of our schools and ensuring our students and staff have the resources and support they need. Whether it's supporting academics, maintaining our facilities, or ensuring access to needed resources, their work makes a difference. On behalf of our entire community, I want to thank our Board for their ongoing commitment to the success of our district. We are grateful for all they do to support our students, staff, and families.

Next week I'll be attending the NYSSBA Conference in New York City, along with Trustee Felice, which will focus on so many aspects of public education. What stands out to me, however, is the fact that one of the keynote speakers is Sophia, a robot embodying the fusion of robotics and artificial intelligence. She'll be speaking about the transformative potential of AI and robotics, addressing both the apprehensions and excitement surrounding these innovations. All I'll say is that I'm equal parts intrigued and petrified at the prospect of our very near future. I'll let you know how it goes.

Best wishes for a great weekend and as always, it really is a pleasure serving South Country as your superintendent of schools.

Tony Santana

#clipperPRIDE