Greetings,

This past week's board meeting was honestly one of the hardest I've been a part of, both as a superintendent and thinking back to my days as the president of my administrative unit when I was a high school principal. Like I've said before, I've unfortunately had to go through staffing reductions more than once in my career, but being in this role now, leading the district, it just hits differently. You feel the weight of every decision in a new way. You're not just thinking about the numbers – you're thinking about the people, the students, the ripple effects on the whole community. I'd be lying if I said I didn't take it personally. Because I absolutely do.

We're still working through the budget and doing everything we can to find additional cuts that won't affect our programs or staffing. That includes taking a close look at our bus routes to see if they can be consolidated, along with the total number of buses we're using. We're also considering a one-year pause on purchasing new textbooks and materials, which could lead to some real savings. Technology upgrades might also be something we hold off on if they're not urgent. Basically, we're reviewing every area of our operations to find where we can tighten up. I want to stress again, we do *not* take staffing reductions lightly. We're doing everything possible to minimize that kind of impact.

I also want to take a moment to really express how much we value and appreciate our teachers and the impact they make each and every day, both in the classroom and beyond it. While all of us in this profession play a meaningful role in shaping our students' experiences, the reality is that staffing reductions tend to hit our teachers the hardest, and I don't lose sight of that for a second. Having spent a decade as a teacher myself at both the middle and high school levels, I understand firsthand the challenges, and the incredible rewards, of working with students. And I'll admit, I was always a little intimidated by the elementary crowd! In my early years teaching in a K-8 school, I'd get pulled in to cover elementary classes and was completely out of my comfort zone. I was terrified! So hats off to all of our elementary teachers, you are truly amazing for what you do with our youngest learners!

But it's not just about the classroom. So many of our teachers lead clubs, coach teams, and give students safe spaces and trusted relationships, especially for those who may not have that support at home. The role of the teacher has expanded so much. It's no longer just about delivering content. Teachers are role models, mentors, counselors, and cheerleaders. You show students what it looks like to be kind, to bounce back from setbacks, and to believe in themselves. When you stop and think about it, we're all helping raise the next generation. That's no small thing. It's a huge responsibility, and I see every day how our teachers here step up to meet it. So thank you, truly, for everything you do.

Given everything going on right now, it's totally understandable that many of our teachers are feeling a bit down, unsure, and anxious about what the next few weeks, and the next school year, might bring. The uncertainty is real, and we get it. And yet, despite all of that, yesterday's Professional Learning Community (PLC) sharing event at the middle school was such a bright

spot. I was genuinely blown away by how many teachers not only showed up, but actually led professional development for their colleagues.

That kind of energy and dedication says so much about who we are as a community. PLCs are about more than just PD, they're about collaboration, reflection, and a shared belief that we can always get better, together. Yesterday, even in the midst of uncertainty, so many people showed up for each other, and that does *not* go unnoticed. As worn down as I may have been feeling, it was uplifting, and not just for me, but for all of the administrators who were there. It was a real reminder of what Clipper PRIDE looks like in action. Thank you for continuing to lead, support one another, and invest in our kids and this community.

I left the PLC sharing event yesterday to head over to the Future School Leaders Academy, which South Country had the privilege of hosting. The academy is run by the Suffolk County School Superintendents Association (SCSSA) and brings together aspiring administrators from various districts. Yesterday's session featured a panel made up of a few district leaders, including three superintendents and me. And I have to say, it was especially cool to see that several South Country teachers are part of this year's cohort. Given everything we've been navigating lately, and how much the role of school leadership has evolved (and not always in easy ways), I sometimes find myself wondering why anyone would want to step into this work. But after seeing the response at the PLC event, the answer was pretty clear. There are still people, right here in our own district, who are genuinely committed to making a difference, who aren't afraid of challenges, and who don't run from adversity. They lean in. Just like so many of you do every single day.

Let's also lean into each other and be the support so many of us need, both in our professional and personal lives. We will continue plugging away and as always, it really is a true privilege serving you as your superintendent of schools.

Tony Santana
#clipper**PRIDE**