

Greetings,

It's only our second full week of school, but already I've seen so much to be proud of. I'll be honest, I haven't been able to be in the buildings as much as I would've liked this week. There's been a lot going on behind the scenes, and I've been spending much of my time focused here at the district office. That said, I've been following along on our social media pages, and the posts coming out of our schools have been incredible. From vibrant classrooms to smiling students and staff, it's clear that the year is off to a fantastic start. Thank you to our teachers, administrators, support staff, and families for setting such a positive tone right out of the gate. There is a lot to be excited about!

Still, the past week has been somewhat challenging. As you may have heard, the Board of Education held a special meeting where two important decisions were made. First, the Board passed a resolution to secure what's called a Tax Anticipation Note, or TAN. This is a standard financial step we take each and every year - it allows the District to meet its obligations while we wait for tax revenues to come in sometime in December. TANS are paid back in the same fiscal year and it's basically like using a bridge to get across a river until the ferry arrives. Still, I understand that seeing a number like \$27.5 million attached to anything can be a little bit much. Please know this isn't new and it doesn't mean something is suddenly wrong. It's simply the scale of what it takes to keep a district our size running smoothly while we wait for funding to be received. It's also something that is unique to Suffolk County and that I was unaware of until talking on this role at a district level.

The second action was the approval of a forensic audit. I know the word "forensic" can be serious, and it is, but it's also a powerful tool for understanding what happened, how we got here, and what we need to do better moving forward. This audit will help us see clearly where funds were spent, evaluate the practices and systems we have in place, and identify best practices that will help strengthen our financial operations in the future. They'll look at how and where the money was spent, look at our financial controls, and provide guidance on how to prevent any similar issues in the future. Ultimately, this is about learning, improving, and ensuring we are doing right by our students, staff, and taxpayers. While I can totally appreciate how a *forensic* audit might be triggering, it's important to know that we are in full support of the measure the Board has taken considering we incurred expenses exceeding the budget for the 2024-2025 school year. It should also be noted that we are also in the midst of our annual external audit which typically concludes in early October. As was shared in the Board's message to our community, the Board is committed to keeping our community informed as this process unfolds and we will provide more information and a corrective action plan as soon as possible.

I know and appreciate how this seems like a lot and it is. I appreciate everyone's patience as we sort through the details. On a more personal note, I had the honor of attending the 9/11 Memorial in Bellport Village. 9/11 has always been a somber day of remembrance for those we lost, and one that still stirs deep emotions for so many of us. The event was triggering to me as an American, as a New Yorker, and as an individual on so many levels. But I also find myself reflecting on September 12, a day marked by unity, compassion, and a shared determination to come together in the face of unimaginable loss. That spirit is what inspires me today. We may be facing some difficult moments, but we are facing them as a community—and that makes all the difference. I mentioned in my message a couple of weeks ago that I will be leaning into the challenges ahead and it's times like these that really define our character. Knowing how strong and resilient this community is, I'm confident we will get through this.

Wishing you a peaceful weekend and continued Clipper Pride. I will do my best to maybe disconnect for just a bit, go to our first football game against East Islip (go Clippers!), visit with mom in the city, and perhaps wish for a Jets victory over Buffalo!

It really is a privilege serving this community as your superintendent of schools!

Tony Santana
#clipperPRIDE