Greetings,

We're officially in the fall season, kinda snuck by us, though it seems Mother Nature can't quite make up her mind. After a few crisp mornings that had us reaching for sweatshirts and jackets, the past couple of days have been like July humid. During this time of year trips down the North Fork have always been an escape for me and as much as I don't like the traffic, it's really been wonderful the last couple of weeks with the harvest and all of the farm activities in full effect! Still, there's no mistaking the shift, fall is here, and with it comes that mix of energy and reflection that always seems to define this time of year.

That excitement was on full display this afternoon at the high school pep rally. The cheers, the music, the sea of red and blue - it was the perfect way to build momentum for tomorrow's homecoming game. It really was reinvigorating for me to be there and actually see over 1,000 students not on their phones! Sure, maybe a few may have snuck them in, but it was not apparent at all. There was just a lot of spirit and pride. And beyond the spirit of homecoming, our high school students continue to give us reasons to be proud. We have students who were selected to perform at the All-State and All-County music festivals, 34 who earned national recognition from the College Board, and an impressive 61 who earned AP Scholar awards for their success on Advanced Placement exams. These accomplishments remind us that Clipper Pride is just as strong in the classroom and on the stage as it is on the field.

Of course, the pride doesn't stop at the high school. At Bellport Middle School, students learned about the traditions of Rosh Hashanah, a wonderful example of culture and learning coming together. At Frank P. Long, students reflected on what it means to be a hero on Patriots Day, while others chose words like "faith" and "courage" to guide them through the year ahead. At Kreamer Street, our young scholars celebrated meeting their summer reading challenge, proof that their love of learning carried right through the break. At Brookhaven, students are working together across grade levels and even teaming up with high school life skills students to support the food pantry, which is such a beautiful example of community in action. At Critz, I was reminded that sometimes the best professional development is simply watching kids laugh and run on the playground, that can lift your spirits instantly. And at South Haven, our littlest learners are already off to a joyful and promising start, it's hard not to walk in without smiling.

There is so much good happening each and every day. I also want to clear up something I've heard floating around: *we're not eliminating field trips*. Field trips remain an important way for students to learn and connect their classroom experiences to the wider world. What we're doing is being more thoughtful and selective, making sure trips are more than just fun, but meaningful and aligned with our instructional goals.

Additionally, we are also preserving our class trips at the middle school and certainly the senior trip! It's a good reminder that rumors sometimes take on wings of their own, but the facts remain steady.

And finally, as we look ahead to next week, I want to pause and acknowledge that Yom Kippur begins Wednesday evening. To all who observe, I wish you a meaningful fast and a time of renewal and reflection.

Here's to a wonderful weekend, a spirited homecoming, and another great season of Clipper Pride. Go Clippers! And as for my beloved Jets…well, cheering for the Clippers is a lot easier than cheering for them. Sigh.

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

Tony Santana
#clipperPRIDE