

Greetings,

This week offered a few moments that reminded me why the work we do, especially during complicated times, matters so much.

One of the highlights was attending Bellport High School's Civics Day and listening to student presentations. As always, our students impressed me with their preparation, insight, and advocacy for the entire student body. One presentation in particular, *Voz y Dignidad (Voice and Dignity)*, focused on ICE enforcement. Given everything happening across the country right now, this is not an easy topic to reflect on. It can feel polarizing, and as a school system we must remain politically neutral. Still, it is difficult to ignore how national events are impacting real people, not just across the nation, but right here in our own community and neighboring districts.

I want to commend not only the students for their bravery and thoughtfulness, but also the teachers and staff who intentionally create the space for students to express themselves, ask hard questions, and engage respectfully with complex issues. That kind of environment does not happen by accident. It reflects a true culture of belonging, one where students feel heard, supported, and valued. Together, I am grateful for how our school community continues to foster learning spaces that are safe, inclusive, and grounded in care. I also want to reassure our community that we will continue to do everything permissible to keep our schools safe and welcoming for all students and families.

That commitment felt especially reaffirmed when I attended Brookhaven Elementary School's Winter Concert. Beyond the joy of seeing our students shine on stage and the pride and happiness so evident on parents' faces, the concert was delivered in both Spanish and English. It was a beautiful and intentional ode to our diversity and a powerful reminder that inclusion is not just something we talk about, it is something we live. Moments like that matter, and they send a clear message that our schools are affirming spaces where everyone belongs.

Earlier this week, I also attended a meeting as part of the 5th Precinct's Community Advisory Board, where we were assured by the Suffolk County Police Department that they are not collaborating with federal agencies, despite some claims that have circulated on social media. I appreciated that clarity and continue to value the role our local officers and all first responders play in supporting our schools and keeping our community safe. We have built a strong, positive relationship grounded in trust and mutual respect, and that partnership matters, especially during these times.

This Monday, we will also be observing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. I will be attending a Brookhaven event honoring his legacy through action, a reminder that Dr. King's work continues to call us to empathy, courage, and collective responsibility.

This message is not about taking a position. It is a reflection and a reaffirmation of our vision, a vision developed by our entire community through our strategic planning process and one that feels truer than ever. Guided by that shared vision and by Clipper PRIDE, we remain committed to creating safe, inclusive schools where every student is heard, valued, and empowered.

Thank you for being such an important part of the South Country community. Wishing everyone a restful and warm weekend and a meaningful MLK Day.

Be kind. Be well. And as always, it really is a privilege serving this community as your superintendent of schools!

Tony Santana
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