



# DRYDEN

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

P.O. Box 88  
Dryden, NY 13053  
Main Office (607) 844-8694  
District Office (607) 844-5361  
FAX (607) 844-4733

Joshua I. Bacigalupi  
Superintendent of Schools  
Dryden Central School District  
PO BOX 88  
Dryden, NY 13053

September 5, 2024

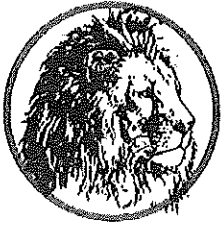
Rockefeller Institute of Government  
411 State Street  
Albany NY, 12203

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Josh Bacigalupi, and I am the proud Superintendent of Schools for the Dryden Central School District which is home to the #LionPride! I have served as the Superintendent of the Dryden Central School District for seven years. I also served as the Assistant Principal and Principal of Dryden Elementary School prior to becoming the Superintendent of Schools. I am deeply invested in the District and community that has become my home after growing up in the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area and moving to Central New York and the Southern Tier.

Abigail Adams stated that "Learning is not attained by chance, it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence". The ideas and implementation of public education is something exceptionally noble and something I am incredibly proud to be a part of.

The ideals of public education and the ideals that our nation was founded upon cannot be realized or achieved without arduous attention and diligence given to adequately and equitably funding public school districts in the Empire State, so that the daughter of a MTA worker on Long Island, the son of a bodega owner in the Bronx, the daughter of an inmate in Attica, Auburn, or Five Points, the son of a fifth generation dairy farmer in Cortland County and the daughter of a grain worker at General Mills in "Elevator Alley" on the Buffalo River have access to the same education and opportunities across the state, especially in this critical period in our history when inequalities across the nation seem to be deepening. Appropriately and adequately funding education is the "ardor" and "diligence" Abigail Adams calls for us to invest in so that the ideals of public education are achieved and the future of New York is prosperous for all.



# DRYDEN

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

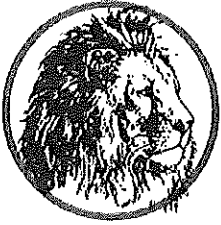
P.O. Box 88  
Dryden, NY 13053  
Main Office (607) 844-8694  
District Office (607) 844-5361  
FAX (607) 844-4733

During the COVID pandemic, the Dryden Central School District cemented its legacy and role in the larger community as the “heart and soul” of our community. The District ensured food security during the pandemic not only for our students, but the entire community by partnering with churches and other non-profit organizations to ensure that there were no gaps in access and that there were multiple avenues to access food. The District became a clearinghouse for families to gain access to mental health and housing resources by partnering with our local health departments. The District provided stable internet connections and schools became vaccination clinics allowing all people in our rural community access to lifesaving care. We did all of this while continuing our mission to educate and empower each learner to achieve excellence and build a better world during a global pandemic. These needs and the District’s role in our community has not changed or waned in the years since the pandemic, but instead have increased.

These needs and the role school plays in supporting students who have experienced trauma or come from families that have suffered multi-generational trauma, who live in poverty, who are refugees from Latin America, the Ukraine, and Afghanistan, who are unhoused or live in transitional housing continues to increase at an exponential rate. Each of these challenges that children carry into a classroom requires very specific, fine tuned and often highly individualized supports and interventions in order to be successful not just in education but beyond the classroom. This is not your grandmother’s school, but we are proverbially “walking uphill both ways to school in five feet of snow” just like she did.

A lasting impact of the pandemic has been a need for mental health support in our community, but a lack of outside resources available to our students and their families. This has led to untreated and undiagnosed mental illness in our students and their families, exacerbating other problems or issues. Due to the fact that our Foundation Aid was “flat” this past year, the District was forced to cut 24 positions including teachers, administrators, support staff, and social workers. The impact the “flat” foundation aid had on our District was a 1.7 million dollar spending deficit which was difficult when we live in a world where revenue is capped at “2%” in regard to taxes and our unassigned fund balance is capped at 4%.

The District was able to close this 1.7 million dollar gap largely through attrition and retirements, so that very few staff members had to be laid off, but the net effect is strained programs, strained systems, and strained staff which impacts students. However, I would like to emphasize how important it is to me as a Superintendent in a rural school district to keep people gainfully employed with opportunities and access to healthcare and a retirement system.



# DRYDEN

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

P.O. Box 88  
Dryden, NY 13053  
Main Office (607) 844-8694  
District Office (607) 844-5361  
FAX (607) 844-4733

The Dryden Central School District is the largest employer in the Village of Dryden. The District is one of the largest employers in the Town of Dryden. At almost 400 employees, we fall just below the City of Ithaca which holds the 10th spot in the list of ten largest employers in Tompkins County. Each layoff the District makes has an immediate impact on the local and regional economy and more importantly works against regional economic growth in the future when our students have less opportunities, less support, and less interventions at school to be successful.

We are proud PK-12 District serving approximately 1500 students with diverse needs in five schools, one non-public school and students who are educated in their homes over 110 square miles in parts of three counties in the heart of the TST BOCES using a transportation network of over 40 bus routes and 390 staff. We served over 120K free meals to students last year-breakfast and lunch. We are a District who as Jo Dee Messina is famous for singing is "stuck in the middle, where money gets tight". However, unlike Jo Dee Messina, we are not "doing alright". There is nothing left for "Peter" to rob from "Paul", or blood to get from stones or turnips, and you cannot cover a bed with a "short sheet".

The entire way that the over 700 public school districts in New York State are funded, including the Foundation Aid Formula should be updated to reflect the real cost of educating students today if the Empire State is going to achieve its motto "Excelsior" which is synonymous with "elevated", "higher quality", "upward", and "excellence". Underfunding New York's public schools is not an option. The state's fiscal circumstances should not form the basis for calculating the true cost of the state's 2.38 million public school students' education. Our students, our staff, our community, our region and its economy deserve better.

Respectfully and with #LionPride,

Joshua I. Bacigalupi  
Dryden Central School District