



# Mount Markham Central School

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## **Finding a Focus**

Abraham Lincoln said that “character is like a tree and reputation is like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it, the tree is the real thing.” As I get older and discover how complex life can be, I find myself trying to focus on what can be more simply understood. Similarly, in public education today, we have been burdened by growth scores that cannot be explained, gap elimination adjustments, common core standards, new evaluation systems, and a seemingly endless list of unfunded mandates, plans, and demands from the state. How are we to understand it all? What can we focus upon that moves us forward and helps us serve our children and students?

Our school district serves many purposes and achieves great progress in many areas. In fact, our district must continue to strive for excellence in all aspects of its program; identifying key areas of focus does not mean that the great work that occurs in other areas is diminished; rather, it is a reflection of the school district’s diverse mission to support student growth and development. It is my opinion that if our school district can find focus and great success in a few areas, this will help us be more successful in every other area.

I think three key areas of focus that we can easily understand, support and become engaged, include: literacy, numeracy, and character building. Literacy is the ability to read and write. Without the ability to read and write well, our children are lost. Without the ability to read and write well, our children will forever be challenged in an increasing complex and competitive world and job market. Numeracy is the ability to understand and work with numbers. If our children cannot add, subtract, multiply and divide with skill and confidence, they will forever be challenged by the digital worlds’ increasing reliance on complex algorithms, an inability to solve complex problems, not to mention the personal finance knowledge that one needs to survive. Character, like Lincoln spoke of, is defined by how one thinks, feels and behaves; character is that set of mental and moral qualities that define us. Without strong character, our children are faced with the great risk of not leading meaningful and fulfilled lives.

Our school district serves many purposes; however, I hope that we can engage our school community in the excellent pursuit of literacy, numeracy and character building in each of our students. Engage with us and help to assure that every Mount Markham student can succeed.

Here are some great activities occurring on our campus over the next month:

## **Public Hearings-May 10**

Please join us at 7PM on May 10 in the high school auditorium for our annual public hearing on the 2016/2017 school budget. In addition, this year, we will also hold the public hearing on the Smart School Investment Plan for the district. After the presentation, there will be an opportunity for the public to ask questions.

The school board has approved an expenditure budget of \$25,284,379 for the 2016/2017 school year. The proposed budget calls for a tax levy increase of 1.98% and overall year to year growth of 3.6%. Most of the growth in spending comes in the form of increased debt service (just over \$600,000). Over the course of the last several months, the board examined every aspect of the district’s operation before approving the spending plan. Voters will have the opportunity to vote on the budget plan as well as three board of education seats on May 17 from 1PM-8PM in the elementary cafeteria.

The budget maintains all existing programs and provides additional staffing support in several key areas. In the elementary school, the budget proposes the addition of one elementary teacher. This addition will support early literacy and smaller class sizes. In the high school, the budget proposes the addition of one special education teacher to support students with disabilities. The budget also seeks to restore a part-time music education position to full-time and supports our athletic program by creating a full-time athletic director/school administrator position. This position replaces the part-time athletic director position that we have maintained for the last several years and adds a school administrator to help with instructional leadership throughout the district.

The Mount Markham Smart Schools Investment Plan is available on our website for review and feedback (<http://www.mmcsd.org/domain/260>). The Smart Schools Bond Act was passed by New York State voters in 2014. Mount Markham has been allotted approximately \$1.4 million to increase district bandwidth, instructional technology and campus safety. The plan has been developed by the district technology committee and has included feedback from students, parents, community members, faculty and staff. The details of the plan will also be presented to the public on May 10. Community members are invited to visit the website to review the plan and provide feedback.

### **Teacher Appreciation**

The first week of May is Teacher Appreciation Week. Please take the time to send a positive note to a teacher who has significantly impacted your or your student's life. On behalf of the Mount Markham Board of Education, let me take the opportunity to thank our wonderful teachers and our entire staff for their efforts on behalf of our nearly 1100 students. Our teachers and staff make a difference every day!

### **Prom Time**

One of the most enjoyable evenings of the school year occurs on May 14. Memories that will last a life time will begin with the Junior Prom Grand March starts at 5:30 in the HS Auditorium followed by the dinner/dance at Francesca's in Ilion and the SADD After-Prom Party back at the high school from 11PM to 3a.m. Prom is a special event and special opportunity for our students and community. It is such a big night and we want all of our students to enjoy the evening safely. We are so proud of our students and grateful for the annual community support shown to the class and in particular to the After-Prom.

### **Extended Memorial Recess**

Just a reminder that school will not be in session May 27-31. Unused emergency days have been added to the Memorial Day weekend. Please have a wonderful and safe Memorial Day recess. Please take the time to honor our servicemen and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of our country.

Thank you for your support and involvement in your school district.