

Over the years, I have found that educators who relate well in the classroom and who love children and respect their dreams are people who tend to know themselves, understand the importance of self-reflection, and value the synergy that takes place in real education.

An honest sense of who we are and what we want to achieve gives us true direction, helps to clarify purpose and expand our capacity to make decisions based solely on what is right. To give our best in educating the children, and to feel the energy of doing our best for them, it is important that we also reflect on what's working, what's not working, and why. The fact that we are living in difficult economic times and working in urban settings where children are most in need gives a sense of urgency to our shared mission, strategic plans, and collective commitment to their success. As a practice, self-reflection can become a way for us to stay strong and focused on the children, their best interests, their long-deferred dreams, and the education they deserve.

I came to this job with five core beliefs that: children come first; parents are our partners; victory is in the classroom; leadership and accountability are the keys to success; and, it takes the engagement of the entire community to ensure the success of our public schools. Whenever I face decisions or consider changes and really need to be honest with myself, I reflect on what I believe. I think back on lessons-learned as an educator for close to forty years. Then I know what needs to be done.

One of the best things about education is that there are so many new beginnings and fresh starts within and beyond every school year. This week the School District of Philadelphia launched a newly designed program for summer learning, as an early initiative of *Imagine 2014*, the District's five-year strategic plan.

The program, dubbed as Summer Learning and More (S.L.A.M.), began July 1 and ends on July 31 at over 130

school sites. Morning sessions will provide academic classes, mostly in literacy and math. The afternoon sessions will offer a variety of enrichment opportunities to students who wish to take advantage of them. Thanks to the generosity of over 200 community providers and partners, students will be able to explore their creative talents in areas such as art, music, and dance. Close to 40,000 students have registered in what may prove to be the largest summer program ever—with a nutritional breakfast and lunch included.

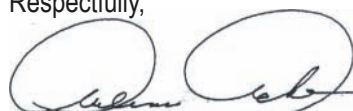
To ensure that Philadelphia's children have a fair chance to succeed in school and life, we need to work at closing the achievement gap as well as an opportunity gap. Knowing from research that most students, especially children from low-income families in urban school systems, lose about two months of grade level equivalency during the summer months, we decided to begin this summer with the intention to grow from here.

When our students come to school this summer they will have academic learning experiences and enrichment opportunities, while their parents can rest easy knowing they have access to healthy meals, safe supervision, and opportunities to achieve and succeed.

Let's stop and think about that, and then imagine even better, brighter days in the years ahead—on our way to 2014.

Before closing, I wish to extend a warm and sincere thank you to every District employee. Your hard work and sincere dedication to the children never goes unnoticed. Have a safe, happy and enjoyable summer!

Respectfully,



Arlene C. Ackerman, Ed.D.
Superintendent
The School District of Philadelphia



Faces and Facts

A salute to our School District's unsung heroes and their work. This issue spotlights:



Whose work is seen by upwards of 3,000 people each day? That would be School District Web Master Chris Akers. On the job less than a year, he loves his work. "I do a lot of things—from simply posting a blurb on the front page of the site or changing a word on another page, to overall maintenance and helping to develop web applications, to responding to emails sent from District personnel and outside visitors," Akers said.

Joelle Breaux, his supervisor, notes that Chris is multi-faceted. "It is Chris' strong artistic ability and creativity that is really an asset. A good example would be the banners he designs for our web pages." A recent example is the special banner that promoted the District's successful involvement in this year's March of Dimes campaign.

On most days, a visitor will find Akers sitting in front of a monitor in the IT office on the fourth floor of the 440 Building. His team includes four people and all work to make sure that what students, parents, employees and prospective employees see when they log on to <http://www.philasd.org> is clean, clear and easy to navigate. Akers is also involved in finding the material to illustrate the site.

He was quite busy in the first week of June, participating in shooting photos of students to be featured on the front page. What else could be such a compelling priority? After all, putting children first is all in a day's work for the web master!