

LYDIA R. SILVA  
Superintendent of Schools

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March 7, 2012

Dear LBOE President Grunhut and Members,

After much deliberation and reflection, I am hereby rendering my notice of retirement effective June 30, 2012. The reasons for this decision are multifarious.

First and foremost, I want to express my appreciation for the privilege and honor of serving the students of the Lakewood Township to the parents/guardians, staff, community members, and those Board Members who consistently supported my work to improve the quality of education offered to our students. It has been rewarding and a source of personal pride to look back at the significant progress accomplished. I humbly state that I know I made a difference in these past three years. In essence, the changes instituted will lay the groundwork for the next Superintendent to take the Lakewood Public Schools to the next stage of reformation and student achievement. As I stated during my interview three years ago, the Lakewood Public Schools can scale the "heights of achievement" and become known for excellence with a consistent focus on student achievement and the support of all stakeholders.

For the benefit of those who were not Board Members in 2009, I will offer a recap in part of my accomplishments:

1. When I arrived, the rate of **Free and Reduced Lunch forms** received from qualified families between 50% and 60%, leaving the District without the necessary and obtainable funding for student services. I was told the parents would not cooperate in sending the forms. My first year it increased by 30%. It is now between **89% and 92%**.
2. After a careful qualitative and quantitative review of the **Lakewood ACE Alternative School**, my request to close it and educate those students in a less restrictive setting in the Lakewood High School.
3. We utilized the funds saved to open the first **Lakewood Early Childhood Center** was Board approved. Today the LECC has received notable praise from many constituents; parents/guardians, teachers, Government Officials. As we expand the LECC services in a

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new site we will be able to offer more students the same quality and state of the art early childhood experiences.

4. All of the current research points to the essential role a **Principal** plays in the achievement of students. Given my successful experience in the other school districts and as a response to many Lakewood Community Organizations and parents, I endeavored to ensure each of our 6 Public Schools had an **educational leader** who was committed to the advancement of students as their number one priority. With the demonstrable support of a majority of the Board and new Superintendent, our schools will show significant and incremental growth in the coming years.
5. In the area of **Technology**, we have come from an outdated and less than efficient technology infrastructure throughout the entire District in 2009 to being at the forefront of the provision of Technology for our students. The hard decision to replace an employee for a skilled technology supervisor has garnered great advances for our students and teachers. This past school year all our fifth and sixth graders were furnished with the state of the art iPads to utilize in the often neglected area of Social Studies. This past week we delivered iPads to our Autistic students because it has proven to be an effective learning tool. We are now wireless in the Lakewood High School. Next year, there is a plan have to increase the number of lap tops and iPads to realize our goal of having a one to two ratio by 2014. Across the country, there is a dearth of technology throughout economically challenged School Districts. That is no longer the case in Lakewood!
6. In the area of instruction, the **Mathematic** rates of achievement were erratic for various reasons; outdated texts, teachers who had not been afforded the appropriate training and antiquated notions of how students should learn math. To vigorously address this, we instituted on-going professional training for our teachers. To assist in establishing research based and modern teaching methodologies, we equipped all students with two new Math Series; Everyday Math and Connected Math. The first year of implementation has students and teachers expressing a renewed interest and “connectedness” to Math!
7. In the area of **Literacy**, we are endeavoring to make the reading and exploration of Literature, not a series of “drill and kill” boring lessons to lessons that inspire our students to love literature through book, word and writing studies. We are eagerly awaiting the results of the two literature experiments in the Clarke and Oak Schools. Each of the principals is instituting different methodologies to encourage the authentic involvement of our students with the written word. These kinds of pedagogical experiments allow for

students, teachers as well as principals to seriously review student data to continually improve instruction.

8. **Continual Professional Development** for all pedagogues is the responsibility of the Principals and the District Office and it has become a key means of ensuring our students are afforded quality instruction.
9. In spite of much resistance, the **Lakewood Paraprofessionals** completed the requisite examination and or college courses in order to obtain the status of "Highly Qualified". The Lakewood Paraprofessionals are at par with all the other paraprofessionals in Ocean County and better prepared to assist our students' learning experiences.
10. Central Registration was an idea that was discussed for the past decade. Together with the dedicated professionals of Lakewood, we now have the **Lakewood Central Registration** site which facilitates the detailed registration process.
11. The first school based **Health Center** will open in the **Clifton Ave School**. The opening ceremonies will take place in June 2012. This was accomplished as a result of my work with the Ocean Health Initiative since the commencement of my tenure in 2009. We jointly applied for a grant and were one of the few school districts awarded the grant.
12. **The Lakewood Police Department and the Lakewood Public Schools** now enjoy a collaborative relationship. To quote Chief Lawson and Deputy Chief Capper, "this is the first time that a Lakewood Superintendent has approached us to work in tandem to educate and keep our students safe. As a result of this collaboration, we conducted our first (in many, many years) search for illegal substances and drugs in the Lakewood High School.
13. The following antiquated **Board Policies** were revised and created and are presently being utilized by Administrators and teachers to better serve our students;
  - a. Student Code of Conduct
  - b. Drug Policy Regulations
  - c. Gang Policy
  - d. Attendance Policy Regulations
14. One question posed to me when I was being vetted for the position of Superintendent regarded the accountability of our pedagogical staff which included Principals and teachers. I was told that the evaluations were poor or just not done. In fact, in a school district that had been categorized in need of intervention by the State Education Department (SED), approximately 98% of all staff was ironically rated satisfactory. I

confidently responded that I would make sure that all pedagogical staff would be evaluated fairly with the proviso it may also result in the loss of employment for those staff members who refused to be held accountable, or possess the needed skill set. Principals and teachers are now being fairly evaluated on the basis of the Core Standards, utilizing the SED approved Danielson model which had not occurred in the past decade, thereby affording our students a rational chance to succeed.

15. Along with Lakewood's finest pedagogues, we researched different grade configuration models and concluded that a K – 8 Model would best serve our students. It is my sincerest hope that the entire Board and the new Superintendent work to achieve the necessary community and parental support to institute the K – 8 Grade Restructuring Plan.
16. **School Improvement Grant (S.I.G.).** The importance of receiving this competitive grant, with the potential for an estimated six million dollars for the improvement of the Lakewood High School was a labor of love for myself and the Lakewood Team that were instrumental in writing the award winning proposal.

Lastly, and most important, I have begun the arduous work of changing the negative aspects of the underlying notion that our students cannot achieve because of their economic or national origins. As human beings we are "hard wired" to learn. It is a matter of accepting our students in whatever "form" they come to us and addressing their needs with the ardent belief our students can indeed learn and achieve. This change will prove to be the most influential factor in the anticipated success of our schools and students.

The aforementioned was certainly not easily accomplished in the face of the consistent resistance and unqualified criticism orchestrated by a few Board Members finally forcing me to lodge Ethics Charges. The Ethics Charges ranged from improperly and personally advocating for third party vendors to consistently making disparaging remarks about the fact that the majority of our parents are immigrants who not speak English hence, "they should all go back" and irresponsible rumor mongering. One rumor, that the BMG was planning to purchase the Oak Street School, functioned to further divide our very diverse and divided community. In the midst of our painstaking negotiations, remarks which were in violation of the Code of Ethics were made regarding our teachers, "let us fire all of them...it would save us money!" Many of these were expressed in emails, at our private sessions and more often than not, in the local blogs. Unfortunately, in order to give the attention necessary to successfully go through the detailed process of defending the Ethic Charges, it would have meant taking valuable time away from my educational responsibilities. It was therefore precipitously dismissed.

So much can be accomplished when a group of committed and dedicated individuals work in tandem and for the same goals. Sadly, my list of accomplishments would be greater were it not for actions of those Board Members.

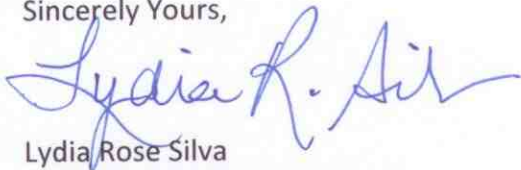
I have stated publicly that the current Board President and the majority of Board Members as well as our Board Attorney are committed to the success of the Lakewood Public Schools. In fact, their collective actions and support provided the "fuel" for many of my endeavors in the past three years despite occasional and respected differences.

Another very important reason for my decision to retire is the anticipated "joy" of having 100% of my time to dedicate to my family! It has been long in coming after a 39 year career and I plan to relish in it.

I will retire on June 30, 2012 as the Superintendent of Lakewood.

Once again, I thank you for the privilege and honor of serving all the students of Lakewood.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lydia R. Silva". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Lydia Rose Silva  
Superintendent of Schools

Lakewood Scoop