

From the Desk of Superintendent Suzanne Guntlow

Superintendent Guntlow shares her thoughts on an academic year unlike any other.



Ichabod Crane Central School Superintendent Suzanne Guntlow (center) is flanked by Columbia County Sheriff David Bartlett (left), and former School Resource Deputy Toby VanAlstyne.

Ichabod Crane Central School District (ICC), in beautiful Columbia County, takes its name from Washington Irving's iconic character in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. The great American author is said to have created the character of tutor Ichabod Crane from a real-life teacher who taught in a one-room schoolhouse in the then-sleepy Village of Kinderhook. But the School District today, serving the villages of Kinderhook, Valatie and Stuyvesant, is anything but sleepy. One of the energizing forces in the District is Suzanne Guntlow, who was appointed Superintendent in July after having served the District in various administrative positions since 2013. Superintendent Guntlow recently spoke to our newsletter editor, Mark Wilson, about taking on her new responsibilities during a time that's anything but normal.

It's your first year as superintendent and we're in the midst of a seemingly relentless pandemic. What is your goal for the ICC community?

Since my very first day, my prime objective has been to provide the safest and most effective learning environment possible for each and every student. All of the primary ICC stakeholders spent the summer creating a plan to safely reopen our schools for in-person learning. Now that we've put those plans into action, my goal is to ensure we are following all health and safety guidelines while also providing stability and support for our students, their families and the staff.

(Guntlow continued next panel)

(Guntlow, continued)

What role do School Resource Officers play in this new environment?

Our SRO, Samantha Plass, does an amazing job ensuring Ichabod Crane is a safe environment where everyone can learn and work. She's a wonderful role model of law enforcement personnel with whom our students can interact, and a great safety educator in the classroom. She works hard at establishing a rapport with all students in order to keep an open line of communication. Since reopening the schools, the only real change in her duties is more strategic scheduling for physically being in the classrooms to ensure social distancing is maintained at all times.

What was the general mood of students and staff going into this extraordinary school year?

The staff and students are all excited to be back in school, engaged in teaching and learning. On the whole everyone has been overwhelmingly positive. All the students who opted for in-person learning have now returned under our hybrid reopening plan, and after so many months it's wonderful to have the students back in the buildings. Things of course look different this year with the health and safety measures, but I've heard from many of our teachers about how well the students have adapted to this new situation. I think both staff and students missed that crucial in-person component of learning so much and had a lot of enthusiasm about returning.

What resources do you use to help shepherd everyone through a typical school day?

We've always had a very strong professional development program and we value providing staff the time they need to efficiently plan for their jobs. That's something that hasn't changed since the pandemic began. In fact, in addition to social-distancing requirements, that is a big part of the reason we chose the final hybrid learning schedule we're using this year. The hybrid schedule provided staff the time they needed to prepare and train before the year started, and to plan for instruction during each week through the year. Teachers need to incorporate new methods of teaching in light of remote learning and social distancing. We also have a thorough four-year Professional Development Plan to ensure our staff members' skill sets remain current and can meet the evolving needs of our students.

The district's relationship with the community has also always been very strong. We've had continuous residential voter support for initiatives like our annual budgets and our 2018 Capital Improvement — all of which help us better serve the students. Knowing that we have that community support, even from residents without children currently in our schools, really helps us to do the best work possible.

What inspires you to do your best each day?

It goes back to that sense of community I mentioned earlier. Since I've been working in the district for some time, I started my new job as Superintendent with so many strong pre-existing relationships with our staff and our school families. There's a mutual sense of trust between all of us and they know I'm committed to Ichabod Crane long term. It's not an easy job being a superintendent, but it is easy to find inspiration in a place with such an amazing community support network.

In the roles I've had here, I've seen this district go through many changes and face many challenges. We always come out together on the other side stronger than before and I know the same will be true when this pandemic eventually ends.