

## **Year-end commentary: Recent initiatives provide a 'relentless optimism' for Westerly schools**

*Sun Publishing Co*

**Editor's note: At the end of each year, The Sun provides an opportunity for area school superintendents and town council presidents to reflect on the year and, if they wish, discuss plans for the new year.**

**Having joined Westerly Public Schools just this past summer, it is fair to still consider me "the new guy." This is not to say that there has not been much both learned and accomplished since July.**

**In a few short months, we have reorganized much of our operations, welcomed new principal and hometown favorite, Steve Morrone, established clear priorities for our improvement efforts and strengthened relations between town and school leaders, both elected and appointed.**

**Additionally, we have seen partnerships established and flourish as the WPS pursues academic excellence daily and as Westerly High School works to establish itself as the comprehensive high school in the region; recognized for high achievement in our classrooms and on the athletic fields, but also for unmatched opportunities in the visual and performing arts.**

**To this end, WPS has already entered into agreements that will bring the resources of the Colonial Theatre to Westerly High and The Chorus of Westerly to Springbrook Elementary. We are also in discussions with the Westerly Education Center, the Rhode Island School of Design and even the legendary Knickerbocker Music Center as the "Knick" works to reinvent itself as a non-profit organization in partnership with the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra & Music School.**

**We look forward to the day soon when our community views the enormously successful Bricks and Murals Festival of September — in which numerous WPS students and staff participated — as not just an "event," but instead as a watershed moment; the beginning of a movement that more seamlessly brings**

together the arts, education and the community.

Westerly already has a vibrant music, art and theatre scene. Why not continually work to strengthen our academic offerings and student achievement, distinguish ourselves athletically — anyone catch that game on Thanksgiving? — develop kids of character who will proudly call themselves Bulldogs for Life (and of whom we can all be proud) and claim our niche as the place where learning and how we apply it reflects not just intellect but the heart, the soul and all that make us the great community that we know we can be?

WPS continues to expand offerings and pathways so as to prepare all students for college and/or career. Our endorsements in the arts, business and industry, humanities and world language, public service, STEM and teaching and our career and technical education programs in the culinary arts, cosmetology — and soon, Medical/EMT — provide multiple opportunities for students to find their passion; that thing that grabs their attention, captures their imagination, touches their heart and helps them set their own course.

The potential of our community and our schools is unlimited. We live and work in one of the most beautiful and culture-rich communities on the entire East Coast. We enjoy the support of a vast network of entities, organizations and agencies committed to improving outcomes for all kids. We have outstanding and dedicated educators and best of all, we have the privilege of welcoming our young people every school day.

There will always be work to do and there will always be distractions and detractors, but it would be impossible for me to be anything but relentlessly optimistic about our future. We know our heading, we know the work. We just need to get after it.

*Garceau is superintendent of Westerly Public Schools.*