

## Connecting to the Future

By Joseph F. Casey, Superintendent of Schools

We live in a time where we view education through the lenses of current research, best practices and the ongoing discussion of how to best prepare our students to be 21<sup>st</sup> century learners, thinkers and doers. Our challenge is in part to help students master content knowledge and skills while at the same time to teach them to be curious critical thinkers. This challenge goes from pre-school through high school and beyond.

We say we live in global times and need to prepare our students to be contributing members of the global community, but what does that mean? How do we in Melrose and the United States for that matter, envision and define what our contributions are and how we give our students the skill sets to be successful? Catalysts, or change agents if you will, provide a focus for us and that is in large part, technological in nature.

Technology has made the world more accessible, more immediate and subject to change at a faster pace. Former Secretary of Education, Richard Riley states that “the top ten jobs that will be in demand in 2010 didn’t exist in 2004.” Studies show that our students today will have changed jobs ten to fifteen times by their thirty-eighth birthday. Some of the college majors that didn’t exist ten years ago include e-business, nanotechnology, and new media. Our students need to have portable skill sets and ways of thinking that will allow them to work independently or as part of a team in a mobile and changing work force.

We are not an industrial nation, but rather an information nation, and here in America, our edge is that we manage information in a creative manner. Daniel Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind*, challenges educators to promote “creative thinking” in our classrooms. Our students need to learn not only left brain linear knowledge, but right brain creative thinking that is spontaneous and intuitive. According to Pink, this type of creative thinking will be “the great differentiator”. Tom Friedman, author of *The World is Flat*, sees schools as needing to “...produce [students] who are good synthesizers, [who will be] more effective and innovative workers.” Technology makes information readily accessible, but we need to teach our students to become “...sifters, sorters and connectors”. Our students need to know the content knowledge in the curriculum frameworks, but more importantly, according to Friedman and Pink, they need to sift, sort and connect that knowledge to solve real world problems in a creative manner.

Melrose continues to make progress in providing students the tools they need to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Recently, a team of teachers representing Melrose attended a technology conference that inspired, energized and challenged them to find new ways to use technology to help our students develop their creativity and gain the skill sets that will help them to become the “sifters, sorters and connectors” of the future.

The Melrose Public Schools remain committed to building the capacity to change, grow and incorporate creativity and innovative thinking into our classrooms. The future needs more than rote learners and here in Melrose, we are using technology as a new route to that future.