

**Plainville Citizen Op-Ed, February, 2018**

The vision for Plainville Community Schools is to ***inspire and prepare lifelong learners to follow their passion, engage in their communities, and positively impact our global society***. Our challenge is to ensure students experience this vision every day in our classrooms. Through our collaborative strategic planning process we developed district goals centered on students, teaching and learning. We then generated a series of actions and outcomes as a roadmap to guide this collective focus. One outcome centers on providing authentic, innovative and creative curricular experiences for all students as a catalyst to maximize their engagement in the learning process. We also recognize the critical need to equip students with the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills to insure success in a technology driven world, and jobs that have not yet been created. The challenge of bringing our district vision to life drives our commitment to providing relevant, innovation driven experiences in all Plainville schools. Our mission to provide authentic real world learning experiences is evidenced in curriculum, programs, and initiatives across the school district that offer a wide variety of opportunities centered on creativity, innovation, and collaboration.

Beginning in elementary school, students come together in a MakerSpace environment where they construct, tinker, experiment, and create. This initiative builds a culture of discovery and creativity through computer coding, building circuits, stop-motion animation videos, green screen, folding origami, taking apart old electronics, and more. At the middle school, we have designed a STEAM lab in which students further their learning and extend innovation via 3D printing design, video production, music technology, technical theater, robotics, and more. At the high school level, students

continue to build on the solid foundation of learning and innovating with a rich Technology Education curriculum that offers a wide variety of course options supporting careers in the STEM fields. Additional opportunities are available to students by participating in the high school's Robotics program, SeaPerch competitions, and several community based projects that come together in the high school's STEM Lab. With these opportunities that include video production and advanced 3D printing technology, students are able to solve real life problems and create solutions that positively impact our school community and the greater community at large. Through this continuum of learning, innovation and real world application, students are equipped with the critical, cutting edge skills and experiences that enable them to transition successfully into secondary education opportunities and the 21st century job market. Innovation in Plainville Community Schools is evidenced at all levels and in a variety of teaching, learning and extra-curricular experiences. Whether it is extending creativity while "tinkering" in the elementary level Makerspaces, utilizing a 3D printer to solve a household problem at the middle school level, team building in the high school's new "Collab" collaborative learning space, or participating in the award winning middle and high school Robotics programs, innovation is at the forefront.

Students are highly engaged and becoming expert problem solvers through their immersion in a variety of innovation driven learning experiences. Further, students take more responsibility for their learning and apply it in solving real world issues in our school district and community. As students move through our school system they become highly prepared for their next level of work, allowing for faculty to teach at higher levels, and extend learning experiences. Staff and students are more engaged

in their work because they can see the real world implications and outcomes are more tangible. Our community benefits from many student driven solutions as a result of the districtwide focus on STEAM and innovation. This includes everything from “fixes” to district HVAC equipment parts created by students in house, to the “Go Baby Go” collaboration among middle, high school and local college students and faculty to modify toy vehicles for special education preschoolers, and more.

Our talented teachers recognize the critical need to prepare students to be successful in a technology driven world and are proud of the high tech, multi-faceted teaching and learning opportunities that have been cultivated in Plainville Community Schools to meet this need.