

Plainville Citizen Op Ed - September, 2012

One year ago I began in the role of Superintendent of Plainville Community Schools. I promised to spend my first year listening, learning, and helping our school district maintain our focus on what I felt were most important: ***students, teaching and learning***. One year later, I report with confidence, that what I have seen accomplished by students, staff, faculty, and administration this past year has been truly amazing. In the classroom, in our hallways, schoolyards, athletic fields and throughout all other school activities, our students are learning, succeeding and exceling.

Last year brought its challenges, as weather wreaked havoc in the fall and we experienced the pain and sadness that came with the tragic losses of students and faculty. But through it all I saw a school system that believed strongly in itself and its ability to overcome and I saw a community that sticks together.

I witnessed our high school students volunteer their time to help elderly residents during the fall power outage when the school became a shelter for many in need in Plainville. I watched hundreds of students interact with admissions representatives at the first ever college fair at Plainville High School. I was thrilled watching a science/technology education collaborative project that brought high school teams from around the state to the Plainville High School pool to compete in underwater robotic exercises where our students excelled, outperforming all others. I had numerous colleagues from other districts share with me how impressed their staff members were after visiting and observing the model Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) program at our middle school. I have observed instructional rounds across all three elementary schools, where teams of teachers are working together, collaboratively with principals, to improve instruction and maximize learning for our students.

Academically our school system remains on the right path - a path of continuous improvement. Too often, too much is made of state standardized tests and the emphasis on these instruments is often completely misplaced and even misguided. However, if we view these tests as we should, with an eye to long-term trends toward improvement, we see that there is much to celebrate in our students' achievement. Faculty, staff, and administrators have worked hard to introduce and support changes in the elementary curriculum and instruction for literacy and numeracy, and it is paying off. Six years ago when the 4th generation Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) was introduced, Plainville's overall performance was clustered with the state average and with that of our District Reference Group, (DRG) (those districts

demographically most like us). Over the last few years we have begun to separate ourselves.

The work and dedication that our middle school administration and staff have put into their positive behavior program has paid dividends for our students. It has helped develop a climate and culture in the school that supports students and supports learning. Last year they saw another dramatic decline in behavior incidents and with it, continued improvement in CMT performance.

At Plainville High School, over the last two years, groups of teachers in all departments have begun to work in data teams, looking at student assessment data and making specific changes in instructional practices that they feel will have a direct impact on learning. That work is obviously paying off. Similar to the results we have seen at the lower grades on the CMT, our students are finding success on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) as well. Plainville High School students are separating themselves from the State and the DRG. But most importantly, positive and productive collaboration in the school has student achievement moving in the right direction.

I am continuously impressed by so much of what I see in our schools and I am confident that many things we are already doing throughout the district are working, and working well. We must stay focused on students, teaching and learning, and continue to develop a culture of collaboration and trust. We owe it to the students we serve, and the community that supports our collective efforts.