

Plainville Citizen Op-Ed, September 2013

The 2013-14 school year has begun with excitement and enthusiasm as we reflect on the successes of the last school year, and move forward with the promise of another outstanding school year in Plainville. We are fortunate to have a committed Board of Education, skilled educational leaders, and a talented and passionate faculty and staff serving as the foundation for our collective success.

We look with pride at the many accomplishments from this past school year. As a community of learning, we implemented a high quality, developmentally and academically balanced full-day kindergarten program. Now, one year later, first grade teachers across the district see the fruits of that labor, as those students come to school with readiness skills beyond that which we have ever seen. A new math program for students in Kindergarten through sixth grade was implemented to better align with the skills required as part of the State of Connecticut's Common Core State Standards. Our Teacher Evaluation Plan was approved by the State Department of Education, and as a result, we now have a plan that is built on trust, professionalism and growth - - the Plainville way. Counselors in our high school and middle school Counseling Departments understand the need for a more individualized approach to helping students plan for life after high school and as such, all students in grades 6-12 have developed individual Student Success Plans. Safety and security issues were also assessed and overall district security enhanced over the past school year, while a review and assessment of special education programming was completed, paving the way for analysis and recommendations that will further improve the services provided for our students with special needs. Efforts to expand Advanced Placement offerings at the high school continued, and upon graduation, 168 members from the Class of 2013 moved on to a college experience, with 132 of those students attending their "first choice" college or university. We also see the results of our work as a school community when we compare our high school students to those from towns like ours. Plainville

students perform at or close to the top of our District Reference Group in all Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) areas. These successes and more are team accomplishments - - - the work that is done collectively, and that which makes us the Plainville COMMUNITY schools.

As we begin this school year, we do so with a new strategic plan, mission and vision for our school district - - staying the course on many initiatives, tested by time, data, and positive results, but also maintaining our commitment to continuous improvement. We have aligned our vision with the Board's mission and goals resulting in an even more coherent blueprint for our work. The Board's mission is clear, "*To provide engaging experiences for all students.*" We remain a school system committed to an unwavering focus on students, teaching and learning.

This school year includes new initiatives designed to align with the Board of Education's mission and the vision for our schools. We will be implementing changes to our emergency management plan that began last year and include a new level of training and preparedness. We will establish a community-wide committee to explore the early childhood experiences of 3 and 4 year-old children in Plainville, and hope the committee's work will result in recommendations for developing a community-based partnership on early childhood and school readiness. Our College and Career Readiness Center is open at Plainville High School, providing students with additional direction and support for success after high school. After school programs, formerly offered solely at the Middle School and Wheeler, will be revised to provide options at all three elementary schools and MSP, featuring enrichment, academic and health/wellness based activities lead by our Plainville faculty members. In promoting the content areas of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), we will be forming a committee with support from key community partners to foster these critical subject areas. Finally, there has been much excitement and enthusiasm as we rolled out our Chrome book initiative during the first week of school, distributing nearly 900 of the devices to students in grades 8-12. Providing this technology tool for learning places our students on

an even playing field. At the same time, the potential that this learning tool offers will open doors for our educators, allowing us to explore the way we teach, new methods for assessing our students, different approaches to engaging students in their own learning, and more. The Chrome books are connected with the online Google Apps for Education platform. Together, these teaching tools have already begun to positively impact teaching and learning.

The 2013-14 school year has begun with pride, enthusiasm and excitement. As a community school district, together we reflect on our many successes, and look forward to the countless opportunities before us. Working together, our vision will guide our work, as we remain committed to providing an academically sound and enriching education for every Plainville student. Together we make the Plainville Community Schools a model of professionalism in teaching and innovations in learning - - the educational environment our students deserve to learn in. Our road map is before us... let the learning begin.