

Superintendent Shawn Dilly Column – 2nd for August

Summer is over and students are back in school in Mineral County. The school year kicked off with a day-long meeting of staff development for all personnel on Aug. 17 and much of it dealt with some of the process we have begun in Transforming Our Schools.

As we continue to move forward in that process several actions have been taken by the Mineral County Board of Education that will help.

At a recent meeting, the board approved the Professional Staff Development Plan for 2015-16. The plan includes the county's requirements for staff development goals, as well as those of the State Board of Education and RESA VIII. RESA VIII is the regional education service agency of which we are a part.

The state will require standardized and/or informal testing for every grade, K through 12 and these results will be used for county and school goal-setting. Professional development is key to the success of the county is getting to the goals.

The school calendar is set by the Mineral County Board of Education and within it are included 18 hours of staff development as approved by the State Department of Education. Six of these hours are to be used to plan at the county level. Each school principal is actually directing the remaining 12 hours of staff development.

Individual school staff development must the improvement needs outlined in the Individual School Unified Plans.

The focus, as we have previously outlined will be to encourage more collaboration among our staff that will improve and expand opportunities for students to be successful.

Participation in the 18 hours of staff development is mandated and must be documented and assured. Thus, if a person misses a staff development meeting it must be "made up." Staff development must be completed between July 1, 2015, and June 30, 2016.

Teachers will complete the staff development evaluation form online, within 14 days of the meeting attended, in an effort to provide feedback for improvement ideas and topics for future staff development. Teachers will also complete staff development logs.

The staff development logs no longer need to detail each hour of participation as they have in the past, but do verify the manner in which the 18 hours were completed. The log may also be used to record house of voluntary staff development completed by professional staff. The logs must be submitted to the building principal on or before the third Thursday in April.

The state and regional goals for staff development are:

- Increase the knowledge and skills of all PreK through third grade educators to deliver a comprehensive approach to early childhood education that includes a balanced approach to early literacy.
- Increase deep content knowledge and proficiency in designing and delivering standards-driven instruction and assessments for all PreK through 12 educators.
- Improve leadership competencies for principals and assistant principals in order to support high quality teaching and learning.
- Support the full implementation of the educator evaluation team.

Program objectives are based on a county needs assessment as described. The general needs assessment used by the county Staff Development Council was derived from data collected during the prior school term. You will note that many of the objectives are focused on our continuing expansion of collaboration among staff and in the community.

The county program objectives are:

- Staff will be provided opportunities to become familiar with current trends, new policies, and acceptable procedures in curriculum, instruction, career development and research.
- Professional personnel will be engaged in goal setting and implementation planning.
- New professionals will be given an orientation at the beginning of the year and they will meet periodically during the year. Mentors will be assigned for first-year teachers.
- Regular and special education staff must be familiar with the law, current IEP (Individual Education Plan) requirements, and the needs of special students.
- Administrators will become functionally familiar with state and country mandates and policies, court cases and current legislation affecting education, as well as with aspects of teaching, learning and leadership that apply to assignments.

In addition, there is a focus on instructional strategies and improvements. Staff should plan instruction, which includes understanding the intended curriculum, with emphasis on written expression problem solving, reading in the content areas, and enrichment/remediation.

Lessons need involve the use of a wide variety of teaching strategies, educational technology, activity-based lessons, including cooperative learning.

There is more to the plan, but, I suggest all of the staff read the adopted Professional Staff Development Plan and begin to familiarize themselves with these requirements.

The last section of the plan is focused on community relations.

All staff members will be provided school and county professional development opportunities on how to connect parents and the community with the schools. New staff members in the middle and high schools will be trained on Web-based communication tools, which provide parents a way to access their child's grades and homework assignments. This also provides a means for parents to communicate with the child's teacher.

While the plan is intended to have more collaboration and cooperation among professional staff, it is also a tool for us to have more communication with the public, including surveys of business and industry. We need input from the community.

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