

MC Superintendent Shawn Dilly - No. 1 Column for May

When we talk about transforming our schools, it is because the mandates and needs have changed for both students and educators.

Mineral County, along with other schools in West Virginia, must reach new levels of accountability. This includes both student and teacher performance, and, I must admit, it can be very confusing to everyone.

We have a new A through F school grading system for our schools. This new grading system, along with the Next Generation Standards and Smarter Balance Assessment have schools all across the state scrambling for solutions to meet the new expectations.

It is imperative that we find solutions as we move forward to create more and better opportunities for our students to excel and participate to their fullest in a future full of even more challenges.

To do that I am looking to you ... our businesses, parents, community and civic organizations ... as well as teachers and administrators for ideas that will us to confront this dilemma with solutions. Yes, there are experts and research available to help us do this, but it is you that we need. It is you that our students will be looking to for goals in higher education, jobs and community in their futures.

The first opportunity for your participation is through the Transformation Summit to be held on May 14 at Keyser High School, for everyone to learn where we are and where we want to go. This event is open to the public ... indeed, everyone in the community is invited to attend and sign up for future participation to help design a program for the future of our students.

Second, I have advocated for teachers to have more time to collaborate in order to hone their teaching skills for the challenges ahead. This requires a proposal for a waiver to the State Board of Education of time in the classroom to support this opportunity for teachers. And while, the initial proposal I drafted met with adversity, it did generate conversation that brought forth new ideas so that a modified proposal now has been developed.

The modification calls for a change from an additional 15 minutes a day to teachers' schedules and a reduction in student instructional time by two days, to an early dismissal of two hours per month. It is hoped that teachers will use that time for the collaboration that is necessary and important for us to make changes. This time has proved invaluable to teachers who have implemented it elsewhere in the state.

After the Transformation Summit, we will look to those who want to continue helping us refine the definitions of skills sets that create the expectations for our students.

The waiver request will allow us to look at teacher effectiveness and quality, do a needs assessment of the county system and schools, and research improving teaching and learning. All of which will help us finalize expectations for graduating students under the new mandates.

We hope that members of the various segments of the community will continue to be involved in the ongoing cycle of continuous improvement over the next months and years.

There is a real opportunity for us to help students expand their growth and learning potential through our collaboration and cooperation in this effort.

College and career readiness are stated goals for our graduates. But, it is not an either/or situation. Students need to prepare for both college and career readiness while also being aware that learning does not stop with a college diploma or a job. Learning is life-long.

I believe we have been teaching to the wrong test ... it is not the scores on tests that are important. It is the students and their individual potential; while teaching is to foster a desire and love of learning in those students.

The test we should be teaching towards is the successful inclusion of our students into society giving them the skills to expand their horizons and to meet all of the challenges and enjoy all the opportunities that the world offers.

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