

Mineral County Superintendent Shawn Dilly Column No. 2

Curriculum and standards are two different things to educators. To others it can be somewhat confusing.

The Common Core standards that we have all been hearing about focus on fewer concepts while stressing deeper learning and understanding, and are part of an overall drive to better prepare today's students for college or careers.

The goal is intended to provide states with fewer, clearer and higher standards that are to be benchmarked against international standards.

Curriculum is based on the standards and is intended to help students achieve that “deeper learning” by building on the basics year by year that begin in the earliest grades.

Here in Mineral County, we understand the desire of the community to provide students with strong educational opportunities. To that end, we are planning to hold a Transformation Summit.

At this summit all of the community – teachers, parents, businesses – all stakeholders will be asked to participate and give their input into the plans for the future of education in our schools. You will help us to determine the minimal skill sets that all students should have upon graduating high school.

A definition will be formulated from this input that will be made available for public comment and will lead to the transformation of our school system.

Mineral County Assistant Superintendent Dr. Jeffrey Crook has pointed out that schools were once a central hub of activity in our communities. Many remain an active part of community life, but few remain the primary location for socialization beyond the Friday night football game.

“It is time that schools reopen in a safe and secure manner to the influence of their communities,” said Dr. Crook.

From my perspective, there is a critical need for educational reform, not only in Mineral County, but statewide. In order to accomplish this we must have your input and ideas. The Transformation summit is one way to accomplish this.

It won't happen with one meeting, it will be an ongoing process through which all stakeholders will have an opportunity to participate.

West Virginia State Superintendent Michael Maritirano's plan for improving the state's schools includes six goals through four areas of focus. Those goals are based on "one Voice, One Focus: All Students Achieving."

In Mineral County, we have chosen to emphasize three of those areas of focus: Improving Teaching and Learning; Improving Organizational Effectiveness; and Improving Stakeholder Engagement. The three areas form a pyramid of action.

To accomplish these goals, we had to start with reassessing staffing based on the state legal requirements to notify personnel of any potential action that would affect their positions. Only one staff member is being terminated and that is due to seniority. However, others have been placed on a transfer list to allow us to realign the staffing to meet the greatest needs.

And, while there has been a great deal of criticism and misunderstanding of what the goals are, we do want to have discussions with teachers and other personnel to get their ideas and input for providing the best opportunities for students.

Personnel Director Susan Grady provided a comprehensive report on the process by which personnel decisions are made at the most recent Mineral County Board of Education meeting. She also provided a list of the specific personnel actions that we are proposing, noting that each has funding for the 2015-16 school year.

In order to achieve the goal of standards, curriculum must ensure that all students are prepared for success in post-secondary education and the workforce by creating a collaborative educational opportunity for students that includes their teachers, colleges, communities, and partnerships with a real world focus.

I highly recommend the book, "Deeper Learning," by Monica R. Martinez and Dennis McGrath. The book is recommended for educators, parents, policy-makers, and others. It takes the reader through eight innovative public schools that are transforming education in their communities all across the country.

We must transition from industrial-era teaching to 21st century learning that embraces technology, partnership; encourages teacher-student-parent, and community relationships.

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