

Superintendent's 2nd Column for April 2015:

Collaboration, communication, and culture. It is communication that leads to collaboration. Why is it important?

I believe it is important so that we can share ideas and create new opportunities for all students in Mineral County. I want to hear what people have to say.

In today's world, communication is tough. So much of it is no longer face to face or even verbal but in the form of texting, e-mail or other non-verbal messages. And those messages often go out to multiple people, many of whom don't read them or just delete them. Communication that leads to collaboration is a two-way street, so everyone needs to be involved.

The focus is on the process in which everyone has an opportunity to participate. There are several steps in this process. I've been meeting with administrators and faculty senate chairs to hear what they think. In meeting with them, I had hoped to facilitate discussion with and among teachers as well.

Another broader step in the process is the Transformation Summit set for May 14 at 6 p.m. at Keyser High School to which the community as a whole is invited to hear from community leaders and others, including educators, while also providing an opportunity for input in creating new opportunities for students.

I have presented to the Mineral County Board of Education the next step, which is to approve a waiver to be submitted to the West Virginia Board of Education that is intended to provide more opportunities for collaboration and communication.

The model that has been outlined for the board is only one of several that could be adopted, but no matter which model is selected the goal is the same.

We cannot build relationships with students without communication among ourselves. If we are to teach children to work together in a cooperative atmosphere, we must also work together.

The waiver is requesting that the State Board of Education allow the Mineral County Board of Education to modify the instructional day by having students come to school 30 minutes later and having teachers arrive at school 15 minutes earlier than they are now. The adjustment would allow 45 minutes each morning for teachers to work with each other to plan curriculum, projects and identify challenges and solutions.

This model may prove to be unworkable but there are others that could achieve the same goal.

Of course, there are some issues on which we may need to work together to resolve but I'm willing to listen and hear what everyone has to say.

No teacher is being asked to work more than an eight-hour day; only 15 minutes will be added to their daily schedule. And while, students will come to school 30 minutes later they will be dismissed at the current regular time.

That part of the suggested model may cause some issues and inconvenience for parents but we hope to be flexible in responding to those issues as well.

What is gained is 30 to 45 minutes of uninterrupted time for teachers to share and communicate on a face-to-face basis when students are not in the classrooms.

I simply want to give teachers and administrators more opportunity to interact with one another, to build relationships among themselves that will enhance their ability to interact and build relationships with students, the students' parents, and other.

One of my concerns is that there has been a bit of disconnect between the grade levels. The goal is for each student is to build on what he has learned from year to year and in some instances there may have been a gap or repetition because there is no clear understanding of the curriculum that builds from year to year or just exactly which skills are needed from year to year.

This is more evident from the Primary School to the Middle School and the Middle School to the High School levels.

We want to ultimately determine what skills students must have upon graduation for them to be successful in a much changed world from that in which we learned.

I don't believe that love of learning is an inherited trait as some people have suggested nor is motivation something that cannot be learned by all students.

Collaboration, communication, and culture are the basis and motivation for life-long learning for all students as they grow into adults and I do believe that is one of our goals.

We cannot go into our classrooms each morning and close the door until the end of the day. We must communicate with one another and share ideas. There is quite probably an idea that one of you have that will not only improve our efforts but generate an opportunity for a whole new future of success for our students and I want to hear it.

###