

Superintendent follow-up to assessment/special ed

We have talked about the need for changes in educating our students, including those with special needs.

It has been a controversial issue for a number of reasons. There is misinformation circulating that has many of our teachers concerned, not only for the programs that serve students, but for their very jobs. There will be changes but many teachers have already said that they view some of the possibilities of change in a positive light.

There are also misconceptions among parents and the public as to what our goals are. Our goals are, as always, the best education for our children.

Let's review some of the challenges to reaching these goals. And, as we do, please remember we have good teachers in Mineral County and they have done a good job with the tools they have had. We hope to be able to offer them some new and better tools to do an even better job in expanding opportunities for all of our students.

At our Board of Education retreat meeting on June 28, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Jeffrey Crook, Special Education Director David Simanski, and I presented to the board members a power point outlining actions taken to date, as well as challenges and goals for the Transformation of Mineral County Schools. The Transformation focuses on three aspects, Teaching and Learning, Organizational Effectiveness, and Stakeholder Engagement.

I began the Transformation process by filling vacancies at the administrative level with specialists in their fields of expertise. Dr. Crook has a considerable background in school improvement. He has spent time in each of the schools looking at programs to determine their effectiveness for student growth.

We have been conducting an informational campaign through speaking engagements, newspaper articles, radio interviews, newsletters and e-mail. More and more information will be available soon on the schools' Website as well links to other state and local education sites.

One of the most valuable tools we have to obtain educational information from the state is the West Virginia State Department of Education Website. Upon opening the site you will see six topic boxes just under the banner with the photo of State Superintendent Michael Martirano.

The six topics are “Creating a 20/20 Vision,” ZOOMWV,” “Simulated Workplace,” “Next Generation,” “Academic Spotlight,” and “Feed to Achieve.”

Our student learning goal for 2015/2016 is that “all students will demonstrate growth on state approved grade level priority standards as evidenced by students’ close analytic reading, understanding increasingly complex text, and information writing as assessed in all curricular areas by Mineral County performance tasks/assessments.” That sounds complicated but, simply put, students will be assessed on all curriculum areas based on their ability to read, understand and apply the concepts they are learning at the appropriate grade level.

Therefore these six topics are of much importance, especially the ZOOMWV, as that is where we find our scores and rankings for measuring student learning. This is available for anyone to find on the Internet and I urge parents, businesses and others to look at this information.

Because we are required to measure student learning, it is necessary for us to focus on data and trends to see where we have been, where we are and where we want to go.

Now let’s look at what the data already tell us. The charts you will find on ZOOMWV show that the Mineral County trends are around the state average and significantly lower for special education students. It will be important to look at data and research-based methods to assist special education to improve results.

At the same time special education student achievement is low, special education expenditures have risen and resources dwindled. Special education enrollment dropped significantly from 2009-10 with 871 students to 2011-12 to 800 students and has steadily risen since until 2014-15 it is now at its highest level at 889 students. It is expected to increase further during the 2015-16 school year. So, it is obvious we are trying to do more with less.

We were out of compliance on seven of 22 measurable indicators of assessment in 2013; 10 in 2014, and eight in 2015. We have actually be out of compliance on four of the same indicators the past three years and the percentages are significant.

Specifically, the percent of students with disabilities proficient on statewide assessments for reading Language Arts are more than more 20 percent lower than the state target and even lower for Math. Other special education student scores are

equally relevant in showing us the need to make changes in program delivery to these students within the framework of the Transformation process.

Mr. Simanski has helped to lay out the issues and some of the solutions we need to be looking at, especially in the areas of co-teaching and collaboration.

Dr. Crook has pointed out that Standards are what we need to achieve and Curriculum is how we get there, so he is looking at instructional alignment and a needs assessment for professional development. Again, we want to emphasize that this is to introduce tools that will allow teachers to do an even better job than they are doing now.

This process includes building leadership capacity through training that focuses on instructional leadership for teachers and principals.

Part of the Transformation includes continuing discussion and collaboration in the community as well as among teachers. To that end, we have established a Transformation Advisory Committee, which includes the members of the Transformation Summit held in May, as well as other community members.

We also have a Teacher Transformation Committee made up of two teachers from each school.

The next step in the processing of building the framework will be our annual county meeting in August at which our speaker will be Dr. Kevin Fleming. Learn more about him at these Web sites – <https://vimeo.com/67277269> and <https://www.youtub.com/watch?v=AcNSpKX8kVs&safe=active>.

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