

Superintendent Shawn Dilly's July 13 Column

Here it is mid-July already and a number of Mineral County Schools' staff members are spending part of it getting ready for the 2015-16 school year, while others are focused on reorganization and the continuing process of Transformation.

Kickoff for the new school year will be on Aug. 17 with the annual meeting and we have a speaker who will help us target specifics in our Transformation effort. Kevin Fleming's "Success in the New Economy" is a video that can be seen on YouTube. It was presented to the Mineral County Board of Education recently and it targets many of the issues we have been talking about in helping equip students with skills for the future.

A quick search on the Internet will locate the video for viewing. Along with the video, we also are using the book, "Deeper Learning," by Monica R. Martinez and Dennis McGrath, as the basis for continuing transformation and collaboration. You will hear more about both as we move forward.

"Collaboration" is a word you have heard me use many times and you will hear it more and more in the future as we get more involved in the process. We have now created time in our upcoming school schedules for teachers to collaborate with each other. We will be doing more and more of that as we also work on collaborating with the community, parents and higher education staffs.

Collaboration builds relationships and these relationships will help to create other relationships not only with each other but with our students thus expanding their opportunities to succeed.

Joining our collaborative efforts will be staff from Potomac State College, who will be invited to attend our opening meeting in the Church-McKee Arts Center on Aug. 17 to hear Dr. Fleming talk about a different way of preparing students for careers of the future.

Dr. Leonard Colelli, president of Potomac State College of West Virginia University, and I have met on this subject and we agree that we need to change some of the things we have been doing and collaborate to expand educational opportunities for students.

The college will be helping to fund the cost of the speaker whose ideas deliver the same understanding that we have that there needs to be a shift in thinking in order to better prepare our students for the real world.

Dr. Colelli believes Dr. Fleming's message applies equally to his faculty and staff as well as ours.

For too long our students have been discouraged from taking vocational classes but now we want to let them know that there can be a blending of instruction in academics and careers so that they can acquire the right skills regardless of their future goals.

Dr. Colelli pointed out that a relatively high percentage of students coming to the college require remediation math and English, increasing the cost of their education and possibly delaying time to graduation

"Having our teachers and theirs communicate and collaborate in the educational process could lead to a better alignment of course outcomes and assignments that will benefit the students," he said.

It is that alignment that we believe is critical to creating new opportunities for students to succeed.

We are looking at a number of other things to assist with the transformation. Among them are assessments that will better gauge the methodology we are using in the classroom as well as some that will help students identify their strengths, weaknesses, and interests. These will help the students and their counselors more easily identify career and educational goals.

Dr. Colelli also pointed out that we might want to consider revising teaching methodologies as well as our teaching facilities from passive learning lectures to more experiential (hands-on) methods that better align with the more dominant right-brained learning style of the majority of our population.

We have discussed several ways in which to recreate the learning environment. And, we are trying to be creative in our thinking.

We also may want to reconsider block scheduling of classes. While it does allow some programs to have more time by joining two blocks, hybrid models also could have some advantages. For example, we could go back to the old scheduling with an eight-period day on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and do block scheduling

on Tuesday and Thursday. That provides the lab times that would be similar to a college schedule.

What we are trying to do is create a framework that allows collaboration among higher education and secondary education teaching staffs to expand the opportunities for students that we have been talking about.

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