

HOPE 2.0

December 1, 2017

Choosing Excellence

Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit. -Aristotle

Few schools have accepted the challenge of making comprehensive organizational improvement. For most districts, school improvement equals higher test scores. Through our Journey of HOPE, we recognize that raising test scores is just one facet of our commitment to the students and families of the Susquehanna Township School District. So how does HOPE set us apart? HOPE allows us to more comprehensively address the underlying *systems* that support achievement and overall student well-being while improving the customer experience for our families. This is not business as usual for schools. We are a business. We have customers. Our customers have a choice. In a nutshell, we are not the only game in town.

So why should parents choose to send their children to the Susquehanna Township School District? My answer would be that we refuse to lower our standards. Do we still have some work to do? Absolutely, but through our Journey of HOPE and the all-important OPR, we continue to challenge the status quo. Do we allow students to behave in a certain manner because that's how they've always behaved? Absolutely not. We teach them to do better. Do we permit community members to circumvent established and vetted protocols because they are unfamiliar with them? Absolutely not. We familiarize them. Do we permit each other to rest on our laurels and revert to business as usual? Absolutely not. We challenge each other. Excellence requires that we push beyond our comfort zones and reconcile who we are with who we *want* to be.

We will never be excellent if we make excuses for each other when we fail to serve students, either willingly or unknowingly. We will never be excellent if we allow students to perform and behave poorly because it's "just the way they are". We will never be excellent if we do not choose to seek excellence in ourselves and each other.

If we are to turn our district around, we must *choose* excellence and then systematically pursue it. It must become a habit. We pursue excellence by fulfilling our mission, ensuring that every learner is successful. We pursue it through our OPRs by regularly monitoring our progress on the District Report Card. We pursue it through our HOPE Team meetings. We pursue it in our strategic planning process by identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). We pursue it by surveying our stakeholders to identify their needs, perceptions, and requirements. We pursue it because we must. Thank you for choosing to serve.

Have a great weekend!
Tamara Willis, Ph.D.
Superintendent

Piece of the Puzzle

Kudos to Mr. Brandon Popp of Thomas Holtzman Elementary School. Thank you for all that you do to promote excellence in your work with students. Continue to raise the rigor and make learning relevant for kids.

A huge thank you to all staff participating in the Penn Literacy Cohort. Per the University of Penn facilitator, “[This is] one of the best groups of teachers I’ve worked with in this capacity. This course has had a profound impact on their professional growth.” You have all represented the district well and we appreciate all that you do!