

Radically Learner Focused

October 29, 2018

Imagine a district in which every student is engaged in challenging, high-interest, authentic learning experiences and looks forward to returning to school each day. Imagine a district in which the learning opportunities are as varied as student backgrounds, affinities, and interests. Imagine a district in which the learning environment extends beyond the traditional, industrialized framework that was established more than 126 years ago?

As a school district, we must never forget that our greatest charge is to inspire, engage and teach children. The core of our work and the focus of our efforts should *always* be the learner. The learner is why we exist. We do not exist to teach *content*. We exist to teach the thousands of *learners* who depend on us each day.

So what does it mean to be radically learner focused? It means that we examine curriculum to determine what students should know and be able to demonstrate. It means that we study the needs (i.e., student data) of each learner before we ever commence writing our lesson plans. It means that we ensure that each of our lessons bridge the gap between the curriculum and student needs. It means that we do not simply start with chapter 1 of a textbook. Instead, we determine who among our students actually needs the content that is covered in chapter 1. Instead, we identify those students who have mastered the content in chapters 1 *and* 2 and then prepare learning opportunities that will still challenge them.

Being radically learner focused simply means that the learner drives *all* that we do. It means that we both acknowledge and defy the notion that one size fits all. Remember, our current educational model was developed to produce workers who could master a standard set of highly compartmentalized skills for use in an automated factory setting. Technology has rendered that mindset, a very fixed mindset, obsolete. The world needs a citizenry that can think critically, communicate effectively, collaborate globally and create exponentially. Are we producing that citizenry at Susquehanna Township School District? If not, why? I can think of a million reasons why we are not or cannot. And yet, we *must*.

As I visit your buildings for brown bag sessions, I look forward to hearing your ideas on how we can become radically learner focused. I should warn you, I will be seeking solutions. I do not have all of the answers, but I know that together we can develop them. So, feel free to bring problems, but do not forget to share your solutions. The future of our district depends on it. See you soon!

Have an outstanding week!

Tamara Willis, Ph.D.
Superintendent

Piece of the Puzzle



Please help me recognize Ms. Patty Frye, Instructional Coach, for continuing to support and nurture students and teachers at Thomas W. Holtzman Elementary. Ever the champion of the Growth Mindset, Ms. Frye worked with teachers to develop lessons about the impact of effort, grit and resiliency on overall achievement. Most recently, Ms. Frye hosted a Teacher De-Stress event at which staff painted pumpkins, assembled puzzles and enjoyed light refreshments before the start of the school day. We appreciate all that she does to make STSD shine a little brighter.