

HOPE Note

April 8, 2019

Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets.. – W. Edwards Deming

This year we devoted our time, our energy, our financial and human resources to the development of social and emotional learning (SEL) and well-being among our students. In January, all HOPE Teams convened to review our progress with our SEL initiative and identified the next challenge to tackle at the district level. The teams identified **Challenging the Traditional Model of Education**, as its next focus.

Does this mean the end of our SEL initiative? Absolutely not! In fact, the SEL Committee met last week to review SOAR survey data from students and staff, and began to think about how to make our opening of school in the Fall of 2019 even more effective. We will continue to provide professional development in the use of the PATHS program for staff working with students in grades K-5, as well as Developmental Designs strategies for staff serving our students in grades 6-12. We will continue to seek staff and student input via quarterly SOAR survey data and we will continue to monitor our disciplinary data. SEL will continue to be a focal point of our efforts in the district. Social and emotional development and mental health needs continue to dominate our national conversation regarding school reform. Therefore, it requires our ongoing attention.

As a school district, our conversation must always center on the learner experience and student success. So, what prompted the HOPE Teams to recommend the traditional educational model as a district-wide initiative? Aren't we already focused on the learner experience? To paraphrase Deming, our current system, is designed to get the results that we are getting. Historically, 30% of our students leave second grade reading below grade level. Over the past 3 years, closer to 40% of our third graders left third grade reading below grade level as measured by the GRADE. Seventy-six percent (76%) of our 7th grade students scored Basic or Below-basic on the math PSSA's last school year. There are numerous other data points that can be shared, but I'm sure you get the point, we have work to do.

Students, society, the nuclear family, and technology have all changed drastically over the past 50 years. Yet schools continue to operate within an agrarian-based system that was developed over 125 years ago, and we wonder why students are not engaged or motivated to participate in their own learning experiences. The learner experience has grown increasingly irrelevant to the

generations of digital natives entering our doors. So how do we remain relevant? Why should we *want* to remain relevant? After all, restructuring a system within which we were reared, taught, and flourished will likely shake the foundation for how we do business and many of us will go kicking and screaming into the unknown. Yet, to continue to operate within the current system, knowing that we are leaving scores of students behind, is educational malpractice.

The HOPE Teams will meet in May to replicate the work that was done with the SEL initiative back in the Spring of 2018. We will spend the day unpacking our current system and targeting foundational structures that we can address during the 2019-2020 School Year. This conversation will be the beginning of a multi-year action plan to transform the learner experience in the Susquehanna Township School District. If you thought SEL was a challenge, sit tight.

I ask that you continue to trust the process and remember that a rising tide lifts *all* ships. If our current system is designed to get what we have always gotten, then it is time for systems-level change. We can do this together. No finger pointing, no bus chucking. A system is comprised of multiple people, processes, and procedures. We are all in this together and we will achieve this change together. Our learners deserve nothing less. Buckle up!

In partnership,

Tamara Willis, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Piece of the Puzzle



This month, we recognize Jaime Marshall. In the words of colleagues: Jaime is a selfless team member who will do anything to help the students and staff of STSD. From keeping up-to-date on the latest research on best instructional practices, to her work with the Keystone exams, and any one of the many committees she serves on, Jaime demonstrates integrity, diligence, and a strong work ethic. She always goes above and beyond what is required to do what is best for the students and staff of Susquehanna Township School District. Thank you Jaime for supporting HANNA Team.

*If you have someone that you would like to recognize for their contributions to the STSD team, please email me at twillis@hannasd.org.