Why Do Schools Exist?

I was recently asked by a doctoral student who is pursuing a degree in Educational Leadership what one piece of professional advice I would share with him. I could think of a few things to share, such as remain positive, respect the work of those you lead and supervise, have a sense of humor, appreciate the huge responsibility that you will be given, and understand that leaders who make a difference have always “stepped” on someone’s toes (often more than once). What I found myself quickly stating was that you need to be passionate and unwavering in your belief that all children will learn to high levels and that children are more than test scores. Our work as leaders and educators not only opens the door for new knowledge and exploration but also ensures social justice and fairness.

Our responsibility is to ensure that our children are learning - not just being taught. As superintendent, one must make certain that the conditions are in place that best promote teaching and learning. One cannot accept that a failing grade means that a teacher just has high expectations or that a student was not motivated - to me it means that a child has not successfully learned what was being taught. It does not mean placing blame on the teacher or the child, but a failing grade does mean that a child is failing. For an educational leader who believes that every child will learn, every failing child is a cause for reflection and concern. As educators, we must avoid the temptation and not fall into the trap of blaming the students or their families when a child fails. When blaming the child or family, the message sent to the community is that schools really don’t matter and teachers don’t make a difference. Roland Barth stated it best: “Schools exist to promote the learning of all their inhabitants. Indeed, the central purpose of a school is to invent and then provide the conditions under which profound levels of human learning can flourish.”

I am very confident that in Harrisonburg our teachers, administrators, and staff are united to discover the best conditions under which all students will learn. We cannot and should not give up on any single child. I know the task is not easy but working together we can and will continue to make a positive difference for all students.

Scott Kizner, Ph.D.
Technology  

Transforming Classrooms into Learning Communities Pilot Program

Imagine a 21st century classroom and what comes to mind – students working collaboratively on authentic tasks, communicating with experts as well as other students around the world, writing and publishing a book online, creating a video to explain an important topic? Technology can help make this happen, and we want to harness that potential for our students. Research shows that the use of mobile devices can increase student engagement and motivation; therefore, HCPS is providing the opportunity for at least 5 classrooms to receive a set of mobile devices to use with their students. Interested teachers will submit a proposal describing their vision of how their classroom may be transformed. Successful proposals will demonstrate innovative approaches to integrating technology, creative thinking, collaboration, project-based learning and more to extend and deepen learning. Watch the HCPS website for the announcement!

Stay in Touch

Do you have a question about Harrisonburg City Schools? Perhaps you heard something at the grocery story that made you wonder, “Is that really true?” Here’s your chance to ask. Visit the Grapevine and post your question:

http://www.harrisonburg.k12.va.us/Forum

Parents may sign up to receive notifications by text message at http://tinyurl.com/textnumber.

Follow us on Twitter @hcpsnews

Upcoming Events

April 26:  HEF’s “A Night on Broadway” Gala – Dave’s Taverna – 7:00-11:00 pm
May 7:   School Board Meeting – City Council Chambers – 7:00 pm
May 21:  School Board Work Session – School Board Office – 5:30 pm
Beyond The Bell!


These were just a few of the enrichment projects on display at this spring’s 21st Century “Beyond the Bell Learning Showcase.” Students proudly shared their learning with nearly 200 family members, teachers and guests at Smithland Elementary and Skyline Middle Schools on Tuesday, March 26th. A lot of joy and pride filled the auditorium, hallways and classrooms as the students showcased the skills they’ve honed after school.

The Learning Showcase serves as the culminating event for students’ enrichment learning from their 21st Century after school program, Blast Off! (Smithland Elementary) and RAOS (Skyline Middle). A hallmark of these programs, the Beyond enrichment classes are 8 weeks long and provide students an opportunity to learn hands-on about a topic of their choosing from a wide range of fields, such as STEM, Arts, and Healthy Living. Program director Brent Holsinger describes the Beyond classes as an opportunity for “learning to come alive and show students the many possibilities that exist in the future.” Beyonds are also a chance for students to make a positive difference in their community, as evidenced by the “Be the Change” group, which performed weekly random acts of kindness and led a school-wide can collection to help raise funds for a local senior citizen to attend a summer camp. The group collected more than 700 cans in total!

Beyond the Bell is a 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, which are grant-funded out-of-school learning programs that involve a partnership between James Madison University and Harrisonburg City Public Schools. 21st Century programs work with schools and the community to better meet the needs of all students and raise student achievement. Catch the latest program news by following us on Facebook at 21st Century HBurg.
The groundhog may have been off his game this past February. According to him, spring weather should have been warming our winter-chilled bones in time for spring break. Yet, can we really find fault with the groundhog? After all, he is just a rodent and our knowledge of the world should have us relying on more scientifically-proven methods for predicting weather patterns (or maybe just accepting the weather as it occurs). So, now that the weather is beginning to match the season, we also need to be warming up our students for the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests.

At the high school level, the SOL tests have an even greater significance for students than those taken in elementary and middle school. In order for a student to earn a verified credit for a course, they must first earn a passing grade and, second, score 400 or above on the accompanying SOL test. These verified credits play a significant part in determining whether a student has earned either a Standard or Advanced Studies diploma.

Teachers at HHS have been working to teach and facilitate student learning so that all students are capable of accomplishing a 400 or above on the SOL tests. In fact, as the tests near, they are providing additional instruction during and after the school day to support our students in their efforts. For those students who fall just short of the 400 score and are deemed eligible for expedited retakes, additional instruction will be provided. (Students who score between 375 and 399 qualify for this opportunity.)

So, as our teachers and students work to prepare for these tests, we ask that families also do their part. This can be achieved by ensuring that students are getting the necessary rest to support the rigors of testing. Also, as these tests can sometimes raise stress levels, helping students manage and alleviate additional stressors can assist with their success.

We have no rodent or other test prognosticator to predict the success our students will have taking the SOL tests. However, support from home, combined with the work that our teachers have provided and the effort that students are putting forth, can make a score of 400 a reality. With these in place our prediction is that success will be high!
Waterman Bike Rodeo

Tuesday, April 9th was a beautiful day for Waterman's second annual Bike Rodeo event hosted by RMH Community Health. Approximately 70 children and their families attended, with many volunteer community partners assisting. Soon after the school dismissal bell rang, children (ages 3 and up), accompanied by parents, started down the hill towards the outdoor track with their bikes of all sizes. Students received a quick bicycle tune-up and helmet check by Harrisonburg Parks and Recreation and Shenandoah Mountain Touring staff.

Students of all ability levels learned something new and had lots of fun. The Rodeo ended with a bike parade! Students rode bicycles around the track, making sure to watch out for others and using all the great skills they had just learned.

Construction of sidewalks and bike lanes has started around WES that will enable safe bicycling and walking to and from school for more students and families in the near future. With this new understanding of safe bicycling, we hope to get students excited about using bikes as a mode of transportation.

Harrisonburg Police Officer Scott Drugo, often seen on bike patrol around town, started off the rodeo with safety skills and practice. Volunteers from the Harrisonburg Fire Department helped lead each of the various activities around the track. New Community Project, a local non-profit, lent a hand as well as Waterman parents Crystal Trost and Tom Benevento. Refreshing orange slices and cold water were on hand to help beat the heat of the day, thanks to volunteers from the JMU Dietetics program.

Thank you to our community partners!

Chris Scott - Shenandoah Mountain Touring
Dan Fudala - Harrisonburg Parks and Recreation
Wanda Willis, Arthur Miller, Erin Stehle, Michael Landis, Kevan Regan, - Harrisonburg Fire Department
Hayley Holmes, Ivy Haines - JMU Dietetics Majors
Chelsea Goss, Sophie Thomas - New Community Project
Becky Johnston - RMH Community Health
Skyline  Stepping It Up!

According to the American Heart Association, physical inactivity is a major risk factor for developing coronary artery disease. It also increases the risk of stroke and other major cardiovascular risk factors such as obesity, high blood pressure, low HDL (“good”) cholesterol and diabetes. The American Heart Association recommends that children and adolescents participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day.

In order to achieve this goal of 60 minutes per day, SKMS has been participating in a “Step It Up” program in collaboration with the Boys & Girls Club of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. The Step It Up challenge is providing opportunities for students and staff to add additional physical activity through a set of fun and exciting challenges. Students and staff will have opportunities to log steps and complete a nutrition survey and physical activity log.

In the hope of adding small bursts of activity throughout the day, a variety of items have been distributed to classroom teachers, such as stability balls, nutrition balls, balance balls, Brain Break CDs and a book that gives ideas on adding movement to classroom lessons. There are also three stationary bikes in the library for students and staff to use!

Using a pedometer, students and staff log steps daily. According to several students and staff, “This makes us aware of how active or inactive we are and motivates us to add more steps to our day.” The SKMS students and staff accumulated over 5 million steps in seven days!

And did you know that exercise actually makes you smarter? Scientists have discovered that when you exercise, your brain produces a chemical that makes it easier for you to learn! (Kids.national geographic.com)

Some research reports that concentration, memory, self-esteem and verbal skills were among the improvements noted in students who participated in school-based physical activity.

Feel free to join SKMS and add some steps to YOUR day!
Spotswood DIG IT!

Spotswood students traveled back in time recently, as two archeologists, Taki and Tut, explored the wonders of several ancient civilizations. The musical, DIG IT, was performed by third and fourth graders under the direction of Ms. Heather Eberly, Ms. Heidi Logan and Ms. Rebecca Wishon.

Following their fossil friend, Lucy, children learned about the farmers of ancient Mesopotamia, the mummies of ancient Egypt and the legend about the founding of Rome. There was even a ‘rap’ from a chorus of Ancient Greeks!

And who doesn’t want to know about Ancient China?! Confucius appeared to give words of wisdom as well as the facts. Memorable songs included, “In My Tomb,” “Greece is the Word,” and “Toga Party Tonight.” Everyone left the auditorium humming a tune!! Spotswood would like to thank the members of the cast, our teacher sponsors and our parents for a wonderful production!!
The Harrisonburg Education Foundation

Presents

A Night on Broadway

A semi-formal event celebrating the Harrisonburg City Public Schools while raising money for the Harrisonburg Education Foundation.

Friday, April 26, 2013
7:00pm - 11:00pm
In historic downtown Harrisonburg, Virginia
at Dave's Taverna

Tickets are $75.00 per person. Ticket includes food, unlimited beverages, live band, dancing, silent and live auction.

For tickets call 540.434.9916