

January 28, 2009

Update from school superintendent: Education vision and mission

The Oldham County school district has embarked on a mission to take a high-performing and very successful school district and move it forward to a level of excellence that equips every student with the knowledge, critical life skills and strategies required for a world-class education.

Achieving these outcomes positions students for successful employment at the local, national and international level.

The Oldham County Board of Education has identified five important areas in which every student must be equipped when they graduate from high school. All Oldham County students, beginning at preschool and continuing through graduation, will acquire the following skills.

21st Century Visionary Student Learning Outcomes

Communication: Graduates will obtain reading, writing, speaking and listening skills that enable them to be successful in a complex and competitive society.

Critical thinking and problem-solving: Graduates will acquire thinking skills and problem-solving strategies that equip them to excel as workers and maneuver through life's challenges.

Media and technology: Society in the 21st century is saturated with an abundance of information. Graduates will be prepared to utilize vital information through a variety of media and technology tools in the workplace and at home.

Creativity and innovation: Graduates will be successful in the conceptual age because they will have experienced many opportunities to use their knowledge in ways that allow them to discover, design and invent concepts and products.

Leadership: Graduates will have experienced ongoing opportunities to grow as leaders who are capable of serving at various levels in society.

For these skills and strategies to be understood and internalized by students, teachers must focus on the following essential commitments daily.

Rigorous curriculum (What do students need to learn?)

Student engagement in learning (How will we engage them so they learn best?)

Continuous assessment (How will we know when they have learned?)

Intervention (What will we do when they have not learned?)

Enrichment and acceleration (What will we do when they have already learned?)

Moving our district forward in this way presents an exciting challenge. Attention must be given to the learning style, learning pace and individual needs of each student preschool through graduation. The following initiatives, which have been in place for the past few years, are having a powerful impact on student learning.

Each school has a highly qualified literacy coach who works with teachers during instructional time to improve teaching practices and impact individual student achievement. Every teacher in the district regularly works on a collaborative team led by a team leader. Teams design lessons, discuss teaching strategies, and assess the learning of individuals and groups of students. Each district classroom is equipped with state-of-the-art interactive technology that enables teachers to engage students in their own learning. All K-12 curricular areas are aligned with high academic standards, providing teachers with a road map that guides instruction. The district service for special needs students has been redesigned to better serve the needs of students, families and teachers. The plan for gifted students has been redesigned to include improved communication to parents, gifted service plans for students, teacher training, reorganization of the district model and efficient identification of gifted students.

Our school board, community, county leaders, parents, school administrators, teachers and entire support staff have always kept the young people in Oldham County as a priority. As we begin the 19th year of school reform in Kentucky, we face some very difficult economic circumstances. School districts across Kentucky, including the Oldham County Schools, are hopeful that state lawmakers will find a way in the upcoming legislative session to maintain the current level of support for the state's school districts. Oldham County currently ranks near the bottom at 171 out of 175 districts in terms of per pupil revenue received from the state for education. A reduction of funds could result in a loss of teacher positions and increased class size, a loss of instructional initiatives and additional reduction of personnel across the district. In anticipation of budgetary issues, several positions were reduced at central office last year.

We are in very tough economic times and our state is experiencing a serious revenue shortage. However, for our vision to become a reality in our district and across Kentucky we must not go backward in support for K-12 education. Our dedication to Oldham County students and to their future must not waver regardless of the challenges we face. State lawmakers are faced with the opportunity to take bold action on behalf of all students and in doing so they will be making the best economic investment possible for Kentucky's future.
