



"SUPE" TALK

FROM DR. JIM LLOYD,
SUPERINTENDENT OF OFCSD

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Our current 2022-2023 school year has gone extremely well so far. I've had the good fortune of spending time in all of our buildings, and talking to our kids and teachers about the great things happening in Olmsted Falls City Schools. It is my pleasure to report on some of the unique things that are occurring in our district.

Our school year kicked off with our staff on August 22nd, and at the front and center were our reasons for being—your kids. Thirteen brave students from preschool through high school were featured on the stage in the High School Auditorium. These students provided sage advice to the 450+ staff who were in attendance by answering questions such as: "What is the most difficult thing about the first week of school that you'd like the adults to know? How can the staff help you be more successful throughout the year?" and "What are your hopes and dreams for this school year and beyond?" We recorded the exchanges throughout the morning and plan on putting together highlights so our community can see. It was both insightful and entertaining.

As we moved into September we saw the Ohio Department of Education release its annual State Report Card that is its way of reporting school quality to constituent groups. As many know, I have been very critical of this system because it exclusively utilizes standardized test scores as a way to provide information to students, parents and others as to how well a school system is doing. I wanted to spend some time in this first newsletter discussing why I am critical of this approach and share with you an alternative model that we've been working on that is more comprehensive.

OFCSD's journey began eight years ago through a strategic planning process that involved students, educators, parents and community members. We began with the recalibration of our district's vision and landed on—***We INSPIRE and EMPOWER all students to achieve their full potential and become meaningful contributors to a global society.*** With this vision in hand we began asking ourselves, how do we know when students are inspired and empowered? What does a school experience look like when the experiences students are provided with inspire and empower them?

Olmsted Falls Schools has long provided a comprehensive Triple A experience for students through academics, arts and athletics. As we looked at the Ohio Report Card system that has remained virtually the same for over two decades, one that focuses exclusively on test scores, we saw the short-sightedness of that kind of accountability approach. Why is it short-sighted? Consider this, students spend about 420 minutes per day in school. That's 2,100 minutes per week and about 75,000 minutes for a school year. That is a considerable amount of time. Why should a school quality rating rely on a piece of data that was gathered in 80 minutes on a particular day in the spring? Because that's the way it's always been? Because a group of people said that's the best we could come up with? Again, this is the school accountability approach that has been in place for the past 20 years. Ohio deserves better.

Did you know that Ohio's \$75 million accountability system uses an 80 minute sample to rate each school district on achievement, how much students have progressed from year to year (i.e. their growth), whether students are on track for literacy, and if districts are closing learning gaps for targeted groups of students? A student's 75,000 minutes of an annual schooling experience is contingent upon how that student performs on an 80 minute experience per subject tested (generally that's math and reading). We believe there are better ways to account for school quality. Twenty-first century methods that pay homage to the student's 75,000 minutes of time spent in classrooms coupled with the amount of effort teachers put forth each day with them.

It seems that every decade a new group of stakeholders throughout the State of Ohio get together and they attempt to tinker (also known as "reform") the current system to make it more understandable for community stakeholders. The most recent group of reformers included local superintendents, elected officials, leaders from the various teachers' associations, members of the department of education, outside watchdog groups like the Fordham Institute and Ohio Excel. The result—the same approach but rather than grades, this time we were given a system of stars. Are these types of annual assessments important? Sure, however they provide us with a small portion of evidence to account for learning and school quality. They come nowhere close to accounting for what people in positions of power want you to believe they do—regardless of whether they try to justify them with letter grades (A - F), a star system (1 - 5) or some other system of symbols.

Over the past 12 months, we have been actively working on a better way to demonstrate school quality. Olmsted Falls Schools was the first district in Ohio to join a network of school districts throughout the country that are seeking to transform (not reform) how we account for the student experience. The approach takes into consideration the 75,000 minutes that students are in school annually and seeks to deliver a more comprehensive report to our primary stakeholders—parents and students.

We have been working to frame the conversation with the internal stakeholders (educators, administrators and so on) with this question—*From your perspective, what are five reasons we educate children?* Externally we ask students, parents and community members—*What are your hopes and dreams?* When you ask these kinds of questions, our experience has been that you begin to discover the kinds of benefits that everyone wants for students. The challenge is that answers given aren't easily measured during an 80 minute period from an instrument that has 25 multiple choice items, 2 short answers and 2 extended responses.

The National network that we are part of seeks to tell the truth in a language that is more readily understood by those that we're providing the benefit to - our students, families and community. It won't require a Master's Degree in Statistics nor will it include a 17-page manual to explain the process. As we build our system it will require us to more deeply engage our students and families. Through our hopes and dreams conversations we're learning that we need to report on Student Learning, Student Readiness for the Future, Student Engagement, Student Well-Being, the Effectiveness of Adults, our Community Connections and how Effective of a System we have. These things may be difficult to "measure" but it doesn't make them immeasurable. Yes we are required to operate within the 20th Century model that has been developed, but our goal is to more truthfully and accurately account for the almost 1,000,000 minutes that our students are with us from kindergarten through graduation. Our commitment is to put forth the time and effort to build something that is comprehensive—something that will create a greater degree of trust with our community.

Over the course of this school year I look forward to sharing more with you. If you visit one of your children's schools I would encourage you to ask the teachers and administrators how they're progressing with our benefits-based accountability system and, in the meantime, think about your own hopes and dreams for your students.

Sincerely,

Jim Lloyd, Ed.D.
Superintendent

