Superintendent's HOPE Note - September 2020

"Don't fear the unknown. Embrace the opportunity. Failure is not permanent, it is the essence of learning." - W. Brett Wilson

OUR NEW NORMAL

My last HOPE Note was written in March of this year. As I prepared this month's note, I could not help but think about how drastically our world has changed. This school year began like no other. More than 50% of our students chose to learn from home. Teachers are simultaneously teaching students from home and in-person. Gymnasiums have been converted into make-shift cafeterias. Every building has an isolation room and yellow dots have been placed on the floors of every building to indicate appropriate social distancing. Welcome to our new normal, at least for the foreseeable future.

I have visited every building and tried to pop into every classroom since the start of the school year. I will continue to make these visits to check in with you, determine your needs, and most importantly, listen. While we have been tasked with an unprecedented responsibility, I am extremely proud of the commitment and resiliency that I have observed from this team.

Why All Remote Access (ARA)?
Securing the Future of our District

Contrary to popular belief, attendance in PA Non-District Cyber Charter Schools is **NOT** tuition-free. As a matter of fact, the Commonwealth of PA requires PA Public Schools (District Residents) to fund these Schools via excessive tuition rates driven by the Commonwealth of PA's flawed funding formula.

The funding formula requires that these PA Non-District Cyber Charter Schools are paid as if they are incurring traditional "brick and mortar" school expenses, which is NOT the case. Studies show that the faulty funding formula results in PA School Districts (residents) paying **two-thirds more for these services per student**.

Hanna Cyber Academy students attend the district at a cost of $3,672 per student.

ARA students attend the district at <u>no additional</u> cost to the district or tax payers.

Core Value: We will be a leader in innovation and technology!

We have the talent and expertise to create innovative programming that will engage students, empower staff, and re-energize our community. So what's stopping us? The technology that our district is using has never been used by a K-12 organization in the country. Hewlett Packard and Microsoft teamed up to document our district's deployment of ARA (a term we created over the summer) and even sent a crew to film our staff and students.

Our decision to bring this technology to the district had nothing to do with notoriety, or recognition. We just knew that our parents wanted more than the Zoom instruction we provided in the spring. So, we started with a simple question: "How can we provide a learning experience for our virtual learners that mirrors the learning experience of our in-person learners?" We didn't even know if the technology existed! Justin Green, Director of Technology, guided our team through the process of finding, vetting and deploying the technology this fall.

Our deployment was not without challenges. In fact, we are still working through them, but our team has accomplished something that MANY thought was impossible. Nothing truly worth doing has ever been easy! We are making a difference in the lives of students and I encourage you to hang in there. Your labor is NOT in vain.

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The Ideal Learning Experience (ILX) During a Pandemic

We are still committed to providing an Ideal Learning Experience for our learners, through Mass Customized Learning (MCL). But, how do we accomplish this during a pandemic? ARA allows us to provide the most seamless learning experience for all of our learners, no matter which of the three models their families selected.

Let me be clear, ARA is not flawless and has its share of issues. However, it is our best option for providing a customized experience for students by accomplishing the following, no matter where they engage in that experience:

- Students maintain established relationships with district staff

- All students are exposed to and engage in the district's curriculum

- District staff can actively monitor student progress and make the necessary adjustments to keep students moving forward or provide necessary supports

We become a major contender when we can offer flexible and customized learning options to our students!

What's Really At Stake. .

Township residents fund Cyber School Tuition primarily via School District Real Estate and Other Local Taxes.

- **PA Non-District Cyber Schools (CCA, PA Cyber, Reach, etc.)** charge STSD **$11,128** to educate a regular education student.

- **STSD's Cyber School Program** costs **$3,672** to educate the same student.

- **STSD Cyber School Programs save taxpayers two-thirds the money or the equivalent of $7,456 less per student.**

- The District currently spends approximately **$3 million** each year on cyber/charter school tuition. If current trends continue, we could see that number grow to **$10 million** in just 5 years.

Piece of the Puzzle

You are all pieces of the puzzle this month. We could not have reopened school without every member of this team. Thank you for all that you do for our students, our families and each other. I am proud to serve with you.