



## Superintendent's HOPE Note - December 2021

"Creativity is intelligence having fun."- Albert Einstein

### **Creativity, Problem Solving, & Discovery**

Hands-on learning experiences, debates, Socratic seminars, students working in small groups to solve real-world problems, experiments, and any other activity fostering creativity, discovery, problem-solving, and critical thinking are all signs of an [ideal learning experience \(ILX\)](#) . These activities are present within a quality educational experience. Moreover, they are also signs of a true customized learning framework. So, let's reset for a moment.



Technology is not a requirement of customized learning. Learning can be customized without a laptop or an iPad. Learning can be customized without web-based software. Learning can be customized without electronic scheduling. That said, learning CANNOT be customized without teachers and staff supporting learner growth.

In the district's efforts to provide an ideal learning experience through customization, we must not forget the foundation of all learning— quality instruction. Laptops will never replace a high-performing teacher. Playlists will never replace authentic conversations between learners and their peers. An ideal learning experience requires that learners look forward to coming to school the next day. While much of that anticipation results from engaging learning experiences, a great deal of that anticipation is upon the human interaction with teachers and peers within those experiences.

Customizing learning does NOT equal a wholesale abandonment of research-based, effective instruction. If students spend the bulk of their day working on a laptop, our processes need refined. If teachers feel resigned to focus on the *quantity* of evidence instead of creating exciting and engaging experiences that promote discovery and critical thinking, we must revisit our definition of the ILX.

**We are here to provide authentic, "boots on the ground" support for staff doing this work.** Going forward, we will engage in non-threatening conversations around instruction in the coming days and weeks. We will also develop exemplar videos to aid in our discussion about effective advisory periods, how to train learners to develop agency, and student-led scheduling. We will cover all of these topics as we focus on quality instruction, which is necessary for any learning framework to succeed. Stay tuned!

*"Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes and having fun."*

*-Mary Lou Cook*

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Visit the district's webpage to see the full [Strategic Plan](#)



### The District's Strategic Plan: Teaching & Learning Goals

#### Critical Success Factor (CSF) Teaching and Learning (T&L)

**Strategic Objective(s):** Continuously improve academic performance, and the social and emotional development of all learners

##### Measures & Targets:

- By June of 2024, 75% of learners in grades K-8, will report growth in Learner Agency tenets of *Mindset, Know-how, and Action*
- By June of 2024, 90% of 12<sup>th</sup> grade learners will report that STSD prepared them to pursue their First Choice for post-secondary planning as measured by the *Senior Exit Survey*
- By June of 2024, STSD will reduce outside cyber school enrollment by 65% as measured by the Cyber/Charter Expenditure Comparison Report
- By September of 2024, STSD will meet or exceed the average statewide growth in grades 3-5 and 6-8 in math as measured by PVAAS
- By September of 2024, STSD will meet or exceed the average statewide growth in grades 3-5 and 6-8 in English/language arts as measured by PVAAS
- By September of 2024, STSD will meet or exceed the average statewide growth in grades 3-5 and 6-8 in science as measured by PVAAS
- By September of 2024, STSD will attract approximately 215 learners currently attending external cyber schools back to the district through its asynchronous virtual solution

The district has experienced a downward trend in student academic performance in English/language arts and math, regularly scoring below state averages. Fourth grade students outperformed state averages in science from 2016-2018, taking a slight dip in 2019. Disruptions caused by the pandemic are expected to adversely impact science scores for the 2020-2021 school year. Seven years of achievement data suggests that a growing number of learners are failing to achieve within our traditional model of instruction. While the district utilizes multiple data sources to determine the strength of its programming, the PSSA is a chief indicator among parents/families, homeowners, and PDE.

In response to trend analysis, the district has adopted a customized model of instruction that targets specific learner needs based upon diagnostic and benchmark assessments. Advanced learners will move through the curriculum at an accelerated rate, freeing them to pursue advance courses or dual enrollment prior to graduation. Learners requiring further support will receive additional instruction, specific to gaps identified in their learning. These learners will also have opportunities to pursue advanced courses and dual enrollment, based upon demonstrated levels of readiness.



#### Piece of the Puzzle

Please join me in celebrating Pat Raugh and Cara Klinger for the tremendous time they continue to invest in support of our teachers across the district. They are working with staff to realign curriculum and working with administration to develop professional development based on staff needs. Both have advocated for teacher needs and are true assets to the administrative teams, K-12. They are instrumental to our improvement as a district and we appreciate them both!