



"SUPE" TALK

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SUPERINTENDENT OF OFCSD

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Accountable for what, and to whom?

Dear Bulldog Families,

This January Supe Talk discusses the school accountability system we're developing and has a link for a survey at the end to gather your thoughts on those things that you expect your school district to deliver on.

Our district's vision is to INSPIRE and EMPOWER students to make a contribution to the world they live in. This vision was created about a decade ago and since then, we have been engaged in transformative work to deliver on it. While Olmsted Falls Schools has always had an emphasis on whole-child education, we have been much more intentional in our approach over the past six years. Specifically, we've been more attuned to establishing stronger student-teacher relationships with the idea that they serve as a foundation for a trusting environment where students are more comfortable taking risks, and are free from any adverse consequences. Our staff has been engaged with a comprehensive professional learning program that has provided a foundation to not simply "plan" lessons, but design engaging instruction. What has resulted is a culture that puts the student at the center of everything. While the curriculum content and standards for learning are the foundation for the "stuff" kids learn, our teachers breathe life into these with assistance from our students. What we've observed is a classroom that is more engaging - and one that is centered on deeper learning.

As we continue to travel down the path of student-centered learning and intentional instruction design, we are reminded that a student's schooling experience is more than literacy, mathematics and writing. While these are certainly critical and at the core of student learning, students spend nearly eight hours per day in school buildings and participate in many activities that shape who they are. The arts, physical education, athletics, science and social studies provide opportunities for them to develop the kinesthetic, aesthetic and critical thinking parts of their brains. These areas coupled with core subjects develop our students' problem solving skills and allow them to display their creativity. They allow them to be collaborative with one another which further develops their communication skills. As they collectively engage, with guidance and under the tutelage of caring adults at home and school, they learn to be responsible, respectful and kind to each other. What results is a self-confident and self-directed student. One that is more resilient, persistent, and independent. One that is able to set goals, manage time and be intellectually curious. When we talk about the "bulldog way" or emphasize that we are "different on purpose," these are the components to the Olmsted Schools Experience and with support from home, it becomes galvanized.

You're probably thinking, "that's great, but that seems like a lot...how do you determine if this is happening?" If you are, then we're with you. It is precisely the reason why the district does not chase or emphasize our students' performance on standardized tests. Not because we don't perform well, but due to the fact that scores and traditional school rankings cannot wrap their arms around the comprehensive school experience that Olmsted Falls Students have. Furthermore, traditional ways of accounting for school excellence do not provide students, families and the community with a comprehensive report as to what a school district is doing well and where they need to institute change. Sure, they show where a school might stand compared to another school on a made-up scale, but they don't report on why school exists in the first place and the value that most people seek from schools.

As a parent, caregiver or community member, ask yourself, "why does school exist...what is its purpose?" When a person begins to answer these questions, they generally do not say, "high test scores." I have nothing against tests or standardized test scores. They're part of the world we live in. However, when it comes to determining what a school is working on, what they're doing well, and what needs to be changed in order to **INSPIRE and EMPOWER students to make a contribution to the world**, test scores fall incredibly short. Students, parents, caregivers, CEOs, managers, business owners, politicians, realtors, media, and community members have grown accustomed to thinking that an accountability system that ranks and orders schools from top to bottom is *THE* way to report on whether a school is effectively delivering on education, and what the world needs from the next generation—not because this method actually works and can help predict future success, but because that's how it has always been done...for 30 years. What has resulted is 30 years of confusion and failed reform. While we in Olmsted Falls Schools can't control how State accountability works, we can choose to be transformative and provide useful information to our families' responses to "why does school exist."

We are a school district that believes in whole child education from Preschool through High School. For a given school year students spend about 75,000 minutes with us and during the course of their entire education, their experience amounts to approximately 1,000,000 minutes. During their journey of being inspired and empowered, we focus on student learning, getting them ready for what's next, student engagement, and taking care of their well-being. As a school system we continually look to learn and improve. We seek effective adults who share our passion for kids. Finally, as a district we believe our community is critical to our success because without them, there is no us. So let me ask, if kids spend 75,000 minutes a year in school, why do we rank school districts on something that takes only 140 minutes to complete on a single day in the spring, every year (Note: generally two tests are taking and it takes about 70 minutes to complete each one)?!? We can do better and communities deserve it.

For the past 17 months, a group of dedicated Olmsted Falls Educators have been working on creating a new system to account for what we do well, and what we need to change in order to improve. We believe that this new accounting system needs to be in non-technical language, easily understood, and not in "educatorspeak." This year, some of our schools have asked families and students, "what are your hopes and dreams?" We believe this is a critical question directly related to what is the purpose of school? When families answer the hopes and dreams question, they respond in the language of benefits. In short, they tell us the benefits they expect from their schools and we owe it to them to develop a system that provides information related to those benefits.

Over the next few months we will reach out and ask our community through surveys and in-person conversations—***what are your hopes and dreams for Olmsted Falls Schools' students?*** Our intent is to gather your responses, look for similarities and turn these into a communication system to tell you what we're focusing on and how we're doing on those items you've deemed most important. Our future is communicating more clearly what we are accountable for, and including those that we are accountable to in the conversation.

These efforts begin today. Please go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HopesandDreams2023> and let us know what you think.

Thanks for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jim Lloyd, Ed.D.
Superintendent

