

With only a handful of weeks to go until the Class of 2016 hits the stage and the rest of the students head out for the summer, we are continuing to work to meet the mission and values of Weston County School District #7. That mission states that we will work to provide relevant and quality educational experiences to ensure success for our students. What we know from the research on the success of utilizing a personalized/customized approach and the hundreds of districts nationwide who have move forward with personalized learning is that positive relationships between students and staff increases and that students strengthen their ability to be confident learners, critical thinkers, collaborators, communicators, and creative.

A couple of weeks ago we held our final professional development day for staff for the year. During that session, we discussed how we are meeting, or are not meeting, that mission on a daily basis. We all agreed that we must continue to keep the mission as a focus every day for our students. With that being said, the topic of the professional development day for teachers, support staff, administrators, and a board member was to look closer at personalized or customized learning and why continuing to move in that direction is critical for today's children.

As part of the professional development this year, the Board of Trustees and many staff members have been reading a book titled *Inevitable*, which takes a look at what education has been for many years, what we have strived to do, and what is necessary for our learners today to be poised for success as they progress through our system and into their careers. Personalization or customization requires that we leverage modern technologies to help dynamically follow and facilitate learning needs of all students and provide a platform to access engaging learning content, resources, and learning opportunities that are not always available within traditional classrooms. When our accreditation visitors came in four years ago, one of our required actions in the following five years was to embrace technology and maximize its ability to take learning to the next level for students. We are just on the cusp of that expectation.

We have known for many years that all students learn in different ways, at different rates, and in different places and have continued to look for ways to ensure these needs are met in the traditional classroom. In recent times, different approaches and strategies have been applied and measured to provide all educational systems with the ability to think differently about how we provide instruction to students. Many approaches can be utilized to ensure that students are mastering the skills we know all students need and that students are provided with personalized pathways leading them to success in whatever they choose as their pursuits.

In order to accomplish this work, we will continue to analyze what we are doing that works, what we could do that would increase engagement and rigor for students, and what we need to stop doing to allow us to move forward. We know that teachers must work as navigators and translators of the work for students while designing the infrastructure for learning and provide "just in time" instruction for

students. We have known for some time now that a one-size-fits-all approach to learning does not lead to the level of student engagement and academic success that schools strive to achieve. We now have the ability to provide student-centered experiences in a more efficient and effective way!

As a district, the 2016-2017 school year will provide us with the collective opportunity to revisit our mission, vision, values, and goals and begin to employ strategies that we know will build success for our students. Approaches could be using a blended learning approach to a core class, a set of career-pathway courses that expose students to a profession along with developing critical job-related skills, a problem-based learning approach tying more than one subject together, a self-paced learning for those who are ready, or others, all while providing our teachers with time and support to ensure our classrooms are meeting each child where he/she is and taking them further than before.