

## **Plainville Citizen Op-Ed, September, 2022**

Our Plainville Community Schools team was very excited to welcome our students back for the start of our 2022-23 school year. We all returned with high energy and high hopes for a much more normal school year, a year with fewer interruptions and barriers to effective learning, and more of the traditional experiences we want all of our students to enjoy. Despite continued awareness of COVID management, and adherence to the State guidance for dealing with positive cases, we are all back in school and learning in person. This is proven to be the best and most effective way for most students to learn, and the most enjoyable and engaging way to connect with others as a member of a learning community.

Our district theme this year centers around the team concept, and emphasizes the importance of every member of the team doing their very best by setting goals, working hard, and achieving both individual and shared goals. Without goals, there is no focus, no identified aspirational outcomes, and limited ability to feel the pride that comes from setting and achieving goals. This year more than ever, we are being very purposeful about setting district, school and individual goals, right down to the student level. In order for us to all grow and improve, we must each put forth our very best effort toward our identified goals. This call for doing our best begins with me, as the Superintendent of Plainville Community Schools, and I am committed to always doing my best for our schools, for our students, and for our entire staff team. However; I know that my impact is relatively small, and I need our entire team to work together if we are to achieve the level of success I know we are capable of.

During our Strategic Planning process last spring, as we were planning and generating ideas about who we are, and who we want to become; we set a visionary goal of becoming THE model school district in Connecticut. I am convinced that our primary limitation to becoming THE model district is our individual and collective belief in the potential we have in Plainville. As a superintendent who is out in our schools a lot, I can confirm that we have absolutely incredible potential to become that model school district in Connecticut, and that is our aspiration. In many ways, we believe we already serve as a model, and I hope our families and staff would agree on that and can think of a list of reasons why that is true - - in many respects, it is true through the opportunities provided in academics, in music and the arts, in athletics, in community service opportunities, in our sense of community and in so many additional ways. However, there are areas in which we continue to have room for growth, and work to be done.

In my visits to our schools and in the meetings with many grade level groups, I have challenged our students to help us be that model district, by putting forward their very best effort. I told students that first and foremost, we need them in school, whenever they are able to be in school-- attendance is critical and foundational to overall success. If students are sick, we obviously want them to stay home and get well, but every day they are able to attend school, they should do so. We want them here, learning, growing and sharing positive school experiences with their peers. I also hope that our teachers and staff remain healthy and well so they can be present as much as possible to do the incredibly important work they do for our district children. I can honestly say that our collective PCS team of staff members is the

strongest I have ever worked with. We have a highly talented group of administrators, teachers, specialists, nurses, tutors, paraprofessionals, technology staff, office professionals, maintainers, custodians, monitors and support staff. All of these individuals are in place to teach, assist and support all of our district children to achieve great things and reach their full potential.

In addition to the members of our team mentioned above, we also have a growing security and safety staff. After hiring our Director of School Safety and Security, we also hired a new security officer for the Middle School of Plainville. Both of these individuals are trained, retired police officers with extensive expertise in safety and security. Director Marques and I continue to work together, along with our Director of Technology and his staff, to ensure that all of our systems, hardware, cameras, software and building functions ensure the highest degree of security possible. We continue to take a number of measures to improve security and safety at each of our district schools. Safety is our top priority, and we have added many resources to maximize everyone's feelings of safety and security across the district.

We continue to work with our district Strategic Planning Committee to make informed decisions about how to invest in our schools and in our future success. Our next Strategic Planning meeting will occur on September 28th, and so much has already been accomplished based on the information we collected from our community through surveys, and through the previous Strategic Planning component in May. We will continue to build on that momentum, set new goals, and strive to be the best over the year(s) ahead.

We are off to a very positive start to the school year. We have made many school improvements across the district, from playgrounds and resources for students and teachers to infrastructure and technology, and we will continue to do so with available resources. Although the request to apply for the Middle School of Plainville “renovate like new” grant was voted down by a 4-3 majority of the Town Council, we will continue to plan for the needed improvements and ongoing needs for keeping MSP operating safely, efficiently and effectively. This will require the support of our families and community so that we can make the middle school as nice as the other five schools that were already renovated like new. MSP is currently just over 30 years old and in need of significant improvements. We hope our Town Council, families and community members will support our application completion for this June so that we can submit the application in the next grant cycle.

In closing, Plainville Community Schools each do a great job of serving our children in so many important ways. We are very proud of the wonderful learning opportunities that our schools provide to our children and families across Plainville. Still, we must not sit back and accept our status as good enough. We must strive to be great, in every way that schools are measured and compared to other schools. We must work together to become THE model school district in Connecticut in even more ways than we currently are. We must continue to work together as a community to inspire, prepare and engage students through meaningful learning opportunities toward their goals. We are proud to serve Plainville’s children and families, and will continue to work as a partner with our families and community members as we give our very best along our shared journey to greatness.

