

Plainville Citizen Op Ed, February 2021

Plainville Community Schools is grounded in our Vision: *To **inspire** and **prepare** lifelong learners to follow their passion, **engage** in their communities, and positively impact our global society.* Central to the pursuits of this vision is a student-centered mission to ensure that every Plainville High School graduate is college and career ready, and well prepared to pursue their future goals and aspirations. To ensure that this outcome is an attainable reality for all PHS graduates, we must ensure equitable access and opportunities for every student in our district.

The 2020-2021 school year has been a roller coaster ride for students and educators alike. This pandemic has also highlighted some concerns with equity across the nation. In addition to the basic needs of food and housing, many students lack access to services, devices and the internet, creating additional barriers to accessing their education. In Plainville Community Schools, we have diligently worked to identify any such barriers, and put resources and practices in place to support any and all impacted students and families. This remains an ongoing process of identification and outreach and we are proud of the universal services and supports we ensure for district children and families.

In order to strive for “equity” we must first define it. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines equity as *“justice according to natural law or right,”* specifically: *“freedom from bias or favoritism.”* How do we apply this to education? We are working to create systems that ensure that every child has an equal chance to achieve success. To do this, we must understand the unique challenges and barriers that our students face and provide them with the unique supports they need to overcome them. Although this alone does not guarantee success, it ensures that every child has the opportunity to succeed.

In Plainville, the goal of our equity work is to meet the individual needs of our students so that they, regardless of culture, ethnicity, wealth, innate ability, language or gender have the same access and opportunity to high level instruction that will help them unlock and reach their highest potential.

Equity in Action - What's the plan?

In our equity work, we are letting the data be our guide. Initial data studies are focused on identifying achievement gaps. We are continually investigating further and looking for trends and gaps within our schools. For example, are any groups underrepresented in the opportunities meant to be available for all students? Once such gaps are identified, the next step is to identify the reason for this, and then create collaborative and sustainable systems that better meet the individual needs of all students. We are also creating avenues through which student, parent and community voices can be heard. We are providing platforms that are safe, available and accessible so that our stakeholders can share both their experiences and concerns. Parents and students participate in meetings and provide feedback via surveys and an open door/communication policy. These measures are in place to ensure that students and families feel welcome, supported and safe.

How are we doing it?

At the district level, the Safe School Climate Committee, led by Assistant Superintendent David Levenduski, is the overarching entity for school climate-related planning. This committee is divided into two subcommittees, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Equity. The Equity Sub-Committee includes at least one administrator and teacher from each school. The objective of the subcommittee is for each school to collect and analyze data, and dive deeper to collaboratively identify areas of need. This information is then used to create a cross-curricular, cross-level Professional Learning Community to

support each other in this work, and to share strategies that will be implemented across the district. Additionally, it provides the school district with information to allocate resources for professional development to support the identified areas of need at each school. It is an individualized process that recognizes that the needs of each building can vary based on their unique dynamics, student demographics and other factors; however, the approach to identify areas of need is universal.

What steps have we taken?

Through our district focus on equity, we have taken several significant steps toward meeting the needs of all of our students. We have retained the services of “on call” in-district translators for the following languages: Spanish, Polish, Portuguese and Urdu. We also have access to translator services for other languages as we recognize the importance of the school-home connection. We are working on finalizing plans for a District Welcome Center (in our new central registration office) to provide support, information and guidance to new families. Additionally, we are working to ensure that books and curricula are available to students which represent the diversity of our student population. Our students participate in Social Justice Read Alouds with a strong focus on identity and respect. Some schools host parents (virtually) sharing stories in their native language to expose students to the variety of different languages and cultures represented throughout Plainville Community Schools. We also continue to seek and nurture partnerships with community organizations including the Open Choice Program, Plainville’s Anti-Racism Task Force, the Plainville Coalition for Positive Youth Development, the Plainville Wellness Committee and more. Additionally, we are reviewing and restructuring our recruitment, employment and retention practices with a focus on attracting and hiring new staff who are representative of our diverse student population.

We understand that as our student population continues to evolve and change, so must our response to diverse needs. We are working tirelessly to create processes that will identify needs and trends, and are adjusting accordingly. In education, the only constant is change. In Plainville, we are committed to providing an equitable and safe learning environment that supports the individual academic and social-emotional needs of every student in our school community. Through collaboration, foresight and teamwork, we will ensure that all students are equipped with the knowledge, skills and resources needed to thrive and flourish.