

A View from the Principal's Office

March 15, 2019

A vision for our work communicates that which we hope, and are willing to work, for with our students as they progress towards graduation and beyond. I have tried to sum this up in the simple statement, *Partnering with all learners*.

Partnering with implies that we are collaborating with our students on their learning. Historically schools have provided students with a short menu of options that, more or less, were driven by adult needs – both adults within the school and the adults in the community who needed high school graduates to be sorted into those who could go to college and prepare for “white collar” work and those who would go directly to “blue collar” employment. This year marks my 40th high school reunion; the Hartford High School I left (and loved) provided these two “tracks.” My high school peers could not choose their path from a full assortment of options; instead we were sorted largely by influences that we had little to no control over. In order to partner with our students we must listen to them, anticipate their needs/wants, and prepare a flexible experience that addresses these needs/wants. We have said that we want to get to “Yes” – this is the manifestation of our partnership. In the coming weeks our students will express their unique educational paths through their course choices and student-led conferences.

All defines our commitment. All means each and every student, no one can be left out or behind – each and every student deserves partnership. Many schools say “all” but really mean “most.” It is in expanding from “most” to “all” that we truly become a school that seeks partnership. All students must feel the importance of partnership. We have students who, for lack of any experience, do not know how to partner in their learning. These students are often easy to dismiss, like most of us they bring their experiences to their school day – and for some this means a lack of partnership, no voice, and a message that school has not been designed for them. We are deeply engaged in this work, I am honored to work in a school that is committed to supporting all students. Recently a video was released that brilliantly expresses one way that we have grown to support all students. I am embedding this video at the end of this post. The video was created by Jay Driscoll and

shares the incredible supports that are available through our fitness center. During the past few weeks we have also seen the student-driven and teacher-supported creation of the Hartford Chapter of Tri-M, a national music honor society. Our first accepted members should be honored by this recognition and being the first at our school to be so acknowledged. Our commitment to all includes our desire to ensure that all students have access to the types of standardized tests that sometimes have been barriers to the college application process. To this end, we will once again this spring provide all tenth graders with a free PSAT test hosted at the Armory in White River Jct. during the school day. We will also provide all eleventh graders with an SAT at no cost. These standardized tests come in the midst of an array of tests, some mandated, and others that students participate in by choice. I will be sharing more information about these tests as our students take them.

Learners, in this context, is our belief that all students can, and want to, learn. It is a conviction that all people are innately interested in learning, that we are all curious, that learning is a human condition. We must seek to partner in finding and fostering that curiosity and spirit to learn; while we can recognize that in some of our students these qualities have become latent, they have not disappeared. It should be our mission that, upon completion of high school, all those who walk across the stage as newly minted HHS alum are prepared to continue to be learners. We know that our task with some is to reignite the fire to learn that at one point in their life burned bright, while ensuring that others simply grow in their desire to learn.

Partnering with all learners requires our school to continuously look to improve. We must recognize the many barriers that impede our students in their paths to learning. Our school will continue to explore the addition of programs and courses that provide greater opportunities from which our students can choose. We are very aware of this commitment and the difficulty we will have in meeting it – every student should find their unique path to graduation, one which balances the traditional learning needs of students with opportunities to make this learning real and personal.

Thanks for reading, the video can be seen at: <https://youtu.be/sN94F2BODjc>

Nelson