

Off and Running

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One aspect I absolutely LOVE about our profession is we are able to draw a firm line at the end of each quarter, semester and school year and then reset for the upcoming school period. Ours is SUCH a passion filled, energetic, complicated and WONDERFUL world, it is extremely easy to fall prey to compassion fatigue and over-all feelings of being rundown. When this occurs, it is ESSENTIAL to take a step back and recharge ourselves for the important work before us. Breaks like the one from which we just returned provides us that opportunity. What we do with that opportunity, of course, is up to each individual.

So, anyway, we find ourselves jumping into the second semester of the school year, having taken the time to take our collective breaths and refocus for the push facing us. Toward that end, there are many exciting initiatives taking place here in the Land of the Longhorns that will certainly prove to be an advantage to our students. Namely, we are continuing our dedication to engaging in activities and educational designs centered on improving our relationships with our students and their families and on ensuring the academic activities in which our students are engaged are truly relevant to their lives. This orientation WILL provide HUGE benefits to our clientele as the learning will be that much deeper and richer.

So as to hit on all cylinders, our teachers are involving their students in a whole variety of project-based learning (PBL) opportunities. Across the entire district, there are examples of students engaged in learning that is more meaningful to them and more “real world” in nature so as to help them see how the academic concepts are useful in everyday life.

Toward that end, the first grade is in the process of designing and then will build a new sandbox on their playground; the third grade is in the process of creating a new outdoor learning space called the “Longhorn Learning Corral,” and the high school Environmental Studies classes is gearing up to re-establish the pond area which sits between the tennis courts and the middle school. These are but a few of the PBL units taking place here in Holcomb. Honestly, you can’t swing a cat by the tail without running into another exciting learning activity taking place. J

I have to tell you, though, this sort of exciting learning environment is NOT created in a vacuum. Rather, many hard hours are spent by the educational professionals in the district to create and then facilitate the learning of the students. A MAJOR piece of this is the teachers have to have a clear vision of the curriculum they are to use with their students. An important piece of that is to have the teachers be involved in a getting an even

better understanding of their academic standards and how best to convey them to the students. This is where curriculum mapping and vertical alignment work comes into play.

“Curriculum mapping” and “vertical alignment” is well underway as the teachers in each content area come together during the Early Release times to strive to ensure our curriculum that we cover in the classes are aligned to the Kansas State Standards and are arranged in a manner that logically leads from one grade level to the next. As the Standards become more and more sophisticated over time, it is imperative we have our house in order so that the students are brought along in a logical manner so as to be prepared for their next academic challenge. When all of this work is completed – it will take at least two years to get this accomplished – we will be in that much of a better situation to ensure our students are ready for life beyond the walls of our school buildings.

THIS is what fuels an educator’s vehicle – knowing we are impacting our students in meaningful ways that will make a difference for them over an entire lifetime. And, as I alluded to at the beginning of this letter, the opportunities to reset ourselves throughout the academic year definitely help keep our academic knives sharpened. J