

The month of July marks the turning of the school year, so let's move "Full STEAM Ahead" into 2018-2019! I have chosen "Full STEAM Ahead" for this year's theme for two reasons. First of all, it is a calling for our district to continue along the same track at full speed. In last month's state of the school's address I shared with you the many successes of the 2017-2018 school year. This year we want the community on board our efforts as we build upon our success. Secondly, the theme accentuates our emphasis upon STEAM learning. STEAM stands for "Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math." Regardless of the jobs that our students will find themselves in, they will need to understand STEAM related disciplines to be successful. So get on board, don't get side-tracked and stay on the train until the end of the line!

This fall we will see STEAM Labs open at each of our K-12 schools. These brightly colored, non-traditional classrooms will provide a space for our students to engage with technology as they work on specific projects. In these labs, we want our students to be creatively connected with the process that leads to a solution. Two groups of students may achieve a successful solution to a given problem; but the process that led to the solution may look very different. Employers look not for employees that apply rote solutions without an understanding of the problem; but for employees that can creatively apply their knowledge to achieve a solution. These classrooms provide an incubator for our student's future vocational endeavors.

These STEAM labs will look different at each school. Whereas at the Elementary School you will see Legos and an augmented reality sandbox; at the Middle School you will see robots and an animation studio with a green screen; and at the High School a laser engraver and a drone. Students will be trained on the use of a 3d printer at each school and have access to virtual reality equipment. All of this equipment is designed to provide hands-on training in the tools of the 21st century workplace. With proper certifications, our students will be able to walk across the stage at graduation and into a well-paying job or into college, ready to succeed from the first day.

This coming year will also see a continuing emphasis on the health of our students. We call this approach the "Holistic Child." We have students with us at least seven hours per day. While students are with us we are responsible for them. We will continue our staff trainings on bullying, suicide, and abuse prevention. We will proceed with our efforts to become a trauma informed school. Trauma has a deep impact on the ability of students to learn. We must do a better job of understanding that students come to us from a variety of life experiences away from school. We need a whole-school effort to make our students feel safe and secure while they are at school. Later in the year we hope to begin a new program called "Strengthening Families." This program will be open to all Doddridge County families and will provide a meal and separate training for children and parents/guardians. This program has worked very well in other places and not only strengthens families, but also brings the whole community together. The health of our students and their families directly relates to our student's ability to stay focused and learn during the school day.

Finally, our last point of emphasis is to provide an education that prepares students for life after high school. I have met many former graduates and asked them what we could do to better prepare them for life after DCHS. They have all replied that they could have been better prepared for the tasks of adulthood. We have examined our curriculum and have decided to design it around what we would like to see in a graduate. Our "profile of a graduate" is a student

who is not only career-ready or college-ready, but is life-ready. We will be offering a new class next year called "Career Exploration." We have partnered with over 40 local businesses to help us in providing real-life work experiences so that high-school students can see what jobs are available and find out what fits their interests. This class will also prepare each student for life as an adult. They will learn how to open up a bank and credit card accounts; how to fill out a loan application; balance a check-book and fill out a tax return. They will also learn the responsibilities of these activities and how to avoid the pit-falls of credit.

I am very blessed to be Superintendent of Schools in a community that values education so highly. Our County has the longest continual excess levy in the state. This provides us with the opportunity to produce not only graduates that excel at the best universities in the world; but also graduates that can walk out of high school into well-paying jobs in a variety of businesses. Our students today will be our community leaders in the very near future. We owe it to them to provide the very best educational experience today. So let's all get on board and go Full STEAM Ahead!