

New School Year Brings New Programs, Changes

This Tuesday, Lakota will reopen its doors to about 16,500 students for the start of a new school year. As always, it was a busy summer of hiring, building repairs and cleaning, staff training and general planning for the upcoming year. Summer always has a way of becoming one of our busier times.

But there's nothing more exciting than welcoming back our students. Seeing their faces on that first day, ready to tackle a new year, reminds us all why we do what we do. It's also energizing to see all that summer work begin to actually take shape in our classrooms, for the benefit of all students.

At the core of our work this year, and every year, is helping every single student grow in their learning, and at their own pace, to achieve to their highest potential. Whether we are preparing a student for college or a career, that process always involves infusing a sense of wonder and exploration into the daily foundational learning that takes place.

Because every student has different needs, those opportunities come in all different forms. Our continually expanding high school internship program, elementary STEAM² labs and hundreds of extracurricular activities, for example, provide all students with a range of options for exploring their interests. New advanced placement courses, online learning tools, a pilot alternative school for at-risk high school students, and a retooled preschool program are among some of the other enhancements supporting student learning this year.

Academic success is our end goal, but getting there requires our teachers and staff to be empathetic, understanding people first. Our commitment to serve every student who walks through our door implies a commitment to also understand their diverse backgrounds and life circumstances, so we can understand their needs and give them the support they require.

That is why I am proud of a brand new staff training program this year. It adopts the broadest definition of diversity, encompassing ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic and even learning style differences. A core group of champions, as we call them, will learn all about the unique qualities that make up our student body, and then real strategies for building strong relationships with students and their families.

All year long, this core group will take what they learn back to their peers so everyone can be better prepared to promote student achievement among all our students.

Finally, if you haven't seen it already, our website at www.lakotaonline.com has a fresh new look just in time for the new school year. We spent the last year redesigning and reorganizing it to be a better tool for anyone who visits us. Not only will you find a dynamic new design with more photos and modern features, but also a new navigation that should get you where you need to go much more quickly and easily.

It's an exciting time around Lakota and I look forward to keeping you informed all year long through this column and all the other ways we find to stay in touch with our community.

Karen Mantia is the superintendent of the Lakota Local School District.