

As I reflect on 34 years in public education, I am reminded of why teaching is important to our children and our communities. Schools were designed to provide learning opportunities for our students to become contributing adults in our society. Learning to read, do simple and complex mathematical computations, investigate the wonders of science, and learn historical truths are important for all children to learn and experience. Historically, public schools provided the space, framework, and instructors for all children to have a similar educational experience kindergarten through grade 12. Students were taught how to live, work, and achieve in a democracy.

As schools progressed, society placed more emphasis on the development of the “whole child.” School curriculum expanded to offer fine arts, home economics, industrial arts, and physical education. This was a step in the right direction and of great benefit, but it did not come without an increased cost. Today, when school districts face financial difficulty, many look to eliminate these programs. This is a tragedy for children. These are not “extras,” but the courses that draw children into learning and motivate them to achieve in other areas of their lives. Many Dover students discover their talents and interest in the arts and athletics in an elementary classroom.

At many different points in history, responsibilities were added and schools became an even more important provider for our children and families. School lunch programs began by making healthy lunch choices available for those students who wanted to enjoy a lunch provided by the school. Families unable to afford to purchase lunches were offered meals for free or at a reduced price. Beginning last spring, Dover Schools provided free breakfast and lunch to all students throughout the school year and over the summer. This service even reaches our students on remote learning and will continue throughout the 2021-22 school year.

In the last five years, I have had the privilege of working with our community and staff to design and build a modern learning environment for our students. As the community worked to build support for the bond issue in 2016, we shared a vision of being able to use the physical environment to enhance our students’ education. Our new high school provides fresh air, natural light, and choices for our students that have a positive impact on their social emotional wellbeing and ability to learn. Modern technology, flexible classrooms, and spaces designed for specific purposes convey the message that learning is valued and children are welcome.

Our teachers, support staff, and administrators study and practice the latest strategies to enable them to meet students where they are and help them to reach their full potential. This is a challenge that is not for the faint of heart. Every year our school doors open to students who have a variety of needs. The range of needs among all of our students continues to grow. These children enrich our classrooms and help us all to learn new teaching techniques.

Most recently students' social emotional needs have been in the forefront. Teachers and school counselors from across the state have worked with the Ohio Department of Education to develop a K-12 curriculum to meet our students' needs at each stage in their development. A student who does not feel safe or who is struggling with mental health issues may not be engaged in the classroom. Districts rely on counselors, nurses, and mental health professionals to identify our students' needs, provide treatment, and make referrals.

These are just some of the roles that school personnel play in the life of our children and their families. In many conversations or news headlines, public education is criticized for all of the needs it doesn't meet in our society, without celebrating ALL of the diverse and ever-growing opportunities provided to our students with the resources available. And when you really step back and look, we are educating the whole child -- just as designed. . . I look at the work of our teachers, administrators, and support staff and am humbled to have worked with such a dedicated group. What a blessing they are to our community. I am thankful for public schools and have been blessed to be a part of Dover Schools.