

October Superintendent's Message
Todd E LeRoy, Superintendent of Schools

Hello RSU 73,

I wanted to take a minute to reach out to all the members of the RSU 73 community, letting you all know how pleased I am to be here and how wonderful it is to be your new superintendent of schools. Though I cannot speak to previous superintendent's practices, I can tell you, under my leadership, your voice has value and I want and need your input in the care and leadership of our school district. Only through open lines of communication can we hope to work as one in providing our students with a superior educational experience. I will be sending out a monthly letter to the district discussing topics of concern to the schools and communities. This month I would like to focus on our district's efforts to make the change from a traditional educational system to that of a standards-based or proficiency-based system.

The largest change we have seen in education over the past few years is the movement to standards-based education. The difference between standards-based and the traditional form of education most of us had is that standards are based on skills and measurable student abilities, where the traditional educational foundation was on factual knowledge. The change to standards is rooted in the changing landscape of the American workplace. Employers need workers who can solve problems, innovate and work in teams. Though knowledge is important, as jobs have become more about service and less about manufacturing, the shift in employer's needs have gone to skills adaptable to many tasks. Because of this shift, this change in employability, we have adopted standards as the educational focus. The challenge has been to develop a method of assessing student attainment of the standards. The result was the development of Proficiencies, Proficiency-Based Education and Proficiency-Based Diplomas. Through the educational process, students will demonstrate their skills, or standards attainment and as they do, the schools are able to, in essence, check off the standards or proficiencies mastered.

Currently, RSU 73 is providing a "hybrid" reporting system, reporting grades as we have since the advent of public education and reporting standards proficiency as well. The problem with such a system is that as we move forward with our proficiency model, the less useful the traditional method becomes. Remember, students are expected to demonstrate mastery of standards or skills and not of content retention. Because of this evolution, as a district we will need to move to reporting student standards mastery and such reporting just doesn't fit the traditional A-F grading system and as such we are working on a grading system identifying standard proficiency attainment.

There is a great deal of confusion and concern around proficiency-based education and many who feel it is a bad idea. I for one believe it to be exactly where we need to be going in our educational evolution. We, as educators, need to be focused on

the needs of our students and in preparing them to find success in their adult careers. If employers are telling us they need employees with different skill sets, we need to do what we can to prepare our kids. I see very few drawbacks and many wonderful outcomes in such a performance-based system. The first thing that always comes up is the effect on our best students and how proficiencies relate to getting into the right college. First, colleges and universities, like school districts, are making the change to understanding and utilizing proficiency-based records, and should have no issues with standards based transcripts. I see this as a minor matter, soon to be remedied. What I see as a huge positive outcome of proficiency-based education is the opportunities for all our kids such a system provides. Students will be allowed to progress at their own pace, and those who are able to excel will have the opportunity to challenge themselves, to take advanced courses, to get college credits and to fly as high as their talents take them. Students who are strong in some areas and less strong in others will be able to learn and grow with other students who have strengths similar to them and students who struggle will have all the time and help they need to be successful. Success is the key! Proficiency-based education allows all students to succeed. When students succeed, they find meaning in their education and where there is meaning there will follow enjoyment. Isn't that really what we want for all kids, success, meaning and a positive experience in their education?

As we move forward with our proficiency-based system we will continue to work with the staff and communities to develop a system that works for RSU 73 and will keep all informed of the work completed. We are here and welcome your concerns, comments and questions. We hope to make any changes as smooth as possible, but the inevitability is that improvements will need to be made. Making improvements and changes can be scary, but they do not have to be difficult. It is our plan to move in steps and stages and to do all we can to assure the improvements are made in such a way so as to be gradual and understandable. If you would like, we invite your participation in the process.