

*'In the Business of Saving Lives'*

As we approach American Education Week, November 14-18, I felt it timely to highlight a recent event that helps convey the amazing learning taking place in Walla Walla Public Schools. A few weeks prior I had the privilege of showcasing our district to over 20 community stakeholders as part of our recently-revitalized Superintendent Patron Tour Program. A diverse group of stakeholders, ranging from parents, grandparents, and community leaders, we spent an entire morning visiting classrooms, interacting with teachers, and conversing with students.

We started off touring the four programs at SEA-Tech, Walla Walla's regional high school skills center located adjacent to Walla Walla Community College. While there, we learned about our amazing nurse-preparatory/CNA program as students demonstrated their skills providing blood pressure checks on many of us. We interacted with the digital media strand where students were busy coding and developing gaming platforms, a high-demand field we hope will supply our new Walla Walla tech company, Ingeniux, with a qualified workforce down the road. We were amazed by the electrical and construction tech program's accomplishments as they continue their efforts building tiny houses for homeless families. And we finished off our SEA-Tech tour awe-struck by the products our manufacturing and welding tech program is producing, catching the eye of Boeing representatives who see our program as a recruiting site for prospective future employees.

Following SEA-Tech we spent over an hour visiting amazing teaching and learning taking place at Sharpstein Elementary where we had just enough time to visit three classrooms. In the first session, we saw graceful facilitation of learning in a two-way dual classroom with purposeful and engaged partner work. We then visited a physics and motion science experiment taking place in an elementary classroom, followed by an authentic language instruction lesson, where plants that students had grown were being used as the basis for their writing prompts.

Before our lunch we swung by Pioneer Middle School, spending nearly an hour visiting an AVID classroom where students were discussing the differences between goals and dreams, caught the tail-end of a rigorous Honors/Highly Capable class challenging our higher-end learners, in addition to a hands-on science classroom where engaged pupils were using microscopes studying cell structures and parts. On our way out, many of us also had the opportunity to visit the new Health Center at Pioneer, where Dr. Kirby and her colleagues were busy attending to student needs, both physical and emotional. As we visited with their staff we learned first-hand how mental health conditions negatively impact our students and their learning, and how the number of affected youth continues to grow across our community.

Once completing the tour, we had the chance to reflect with the community visitors over lunch, as they commented on what they had witnessed throughout the morning. To no ones' surprise, the guests were extremely impressed by what they saw; dedicated staff, engaged students, and caring adults. Just as intriguing, was the themed feedback pertaining to "how different" schools are now compared to when many of them attended. We spent some time discussing trauma, poverty, ACE's, mental health, special education, second language learners, engagement strategies, and other considerations, that were not

commonly faced even 10-15 years ago to the level and severity we are addressing and supporting them today.

I took the opportunity to share with all of them that schools nowadays are no longer just in the business of teaching math, literacy, arts and sciences. Rather, we are expected and need to address considerably more issues while still ensuring students meet the high academic standards necessary for life-long success and prosperity. No doubt, it is a much more complex job today than it has ever been. An incredible role we all play, I shared with the patrons that most public schools now serve as the first and last line of defense for our students, as many of them are void of the role models, families, and supports that can "pick them up" if we are unable to fully engage them. And if we are unsuccessful "reaching" students, the unfortunate statistic is that it is more likely than not that anyone will. Although it is a tremendous and awesome responsibility, I know that it is one that my colleagues and I in Walla Walla Public Schools collectively embrace. Best stated by educational consultant Dr. Luis Cruz, "We can no longer think of ourselves as just being in the education business anymore...we are truly in the business of SAVING LIVES."

Help me in congratulating the outstanding learning taking place in Walla Walla Public Schools as we celebrate American Education Week, November 14-18.