

## DISTRICT 202 COMMUNITY COLUMN

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“Those classes are too hard. You’re asking students to do too much. Not everyone is going to college.”

We have heard this kind of comment a lot lately. But the strange thing is, by and large students aren’t the ones lobbing these concerns.

Rather, they tend to come from parents and educators concerned that their students cannot do more challenging class work. Some contend that not all students intend to go to college and therefore should not have to take “college” level courses. As a parent, I understand parents’ intuitive need to protect their children from failure.

Yet, as an educator, I also know that many people – parents and educators alike -- underestimate both what the world will demand of our students and their abilities to rise to a high standard.

District 202 is working hard to increase the rigor of our curriculum at all levels, but especially at high school. It is increasingly clear that all students need high-level skills and knowledge to succeed in today’s world, whether their next steps into that world lead them to college, the work place, the military or anywhere else.

Part of that work has included eliminating some low level classes that, we believe, no longer serve our students’ best academic interests. At the same time we’ve added nine new AP courses this year and plan to add eight more AP courses over the next two years. We are increasing access to these more challenging courses for all of our students. And we’re providing more and better support systems so that all of our students can reach their maximum individual potential.

Research is clearly showing that in today’s world, “college” skills and “workplace” skills are largely the same.

For example, college students writing a thesis must identify a problem, do research that will help shape a solution, propose a solution and then prove the solution. Employers say they want workers with the same critical thinking skills. And both employers and universities say that not nearly enough of the young people coming to them have these skills.

In public education, we must see today’s reality and tomorrow’s opportunity and give our students the tools to seek and succeed in both. We must not hold our students hostage to old ideas. We can no longer afford to lower our expectations of our students.

Public schools have the unique duty to educate all students, no matter their previous learning, language skills, or socioeconomic background. But we cannot let that fact continue to be an excuse for failure – either on the part of students, or the adults who teach and love them. We can no longer afford to say, “Some kids just cannot learn.”

Instead we must set the bar high for all of our students – even students say that they want to be challenged more in school – and give them appropriate support to bolster their efforts. We do this through a challenging

and relevant curriculum open to all, and meaningful relationships with caring adults. It is amazing what children will do when they know people believe in them.

We must challenge, support and serve all of our students equitably so that each may succeed in the world after high school – no matter what that world holds, be it ivy-colored university walls, a steady paycheck or another of life's many options.

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