

DISTRICT 202 COMMUNITY COLUMN

By Dr. John Harper
Superintendent of Schools
April 2007

Some people say that there is more to school than just academics and test scores.

I agree.

But that is not to say that everything that happens in school doesn't help students learn valuable life lessons, even if a standardized test isn't involved. Specifically, I am referring to community service.

If you haven't visited our District 202 web site lately or don't already receive our "District 202 Education Partners" electronic newsletter – and if you don't I encourage you to visit our web site and sign up for this valuable communications tool – then you may not have noticed the many stories about the ways our students and staff have served our community this school year.

I am very proud of every effort that has been made to help improve the lives of those around us, many, if not most of whom we will never even meet.

Just as one example, District 202 was the leading giver among school districts in this year's United Way campaign. The money our staff has donated and pledged will help hundreds if not thousands of people in our area to meet financial, physical and emotional challenges that we may never have to confront – and some that we'll all have to address at some point, like the death of a loved one.

As wonderful as that example is, I am equally proud of every special event that our students and families have supported to help someone in need: spaghetti dinners, coin collections, clothing drives, supply donations, garage and bake sales, walk-a-thons, pig kissing and rope jumping contests, and many more.

These activities have helped a myriad number of people in need, from children with physical challenges to families touched by breast cancer to soldiers defending our freedom halfway around the world.

Certainly it can be argued that none of these activities will necessarily help our students do better on the state test or improve his or her chances of being accepted into the first college of their choice.

True enough. But each of these initiatives – in fact, every opportunity to connect with the world outside of the four walls of school in a real, meaningful way – helps our students become better people.

Through community service, our young people learn the importance of building and fostering positive relationships. They learn respect for themselves and for others. They learn to appreciate diversity. They learn teamwork.

And perhaps most importantly, they learn that the world is about more than just them. Just as school is about more than just academics and test scores.

That is a valuable lesson for everyone, and one we're happy and proud to teach in District 202.

Dr. John Harper
Superintendent of Schools
Plainfield Community Consolidated School District 202