



# Superintendent's Column

## The building blocks of great learning

I hope this issue of *the Focus* finds your family well and enjoying the beginning of another great school year. I want to use my space in this month's *Focus* to write about . . . our school district's focus. The focus of our school district is to assure that every child has a great learning experience in every class every day through excellence in teaching and in leadership. Research clearly tells us that great learning experiences are most likely to occur when each child feels safe in their learning environment, is healthy and is actively engaged by their teacher in the learning experience being offered in the classroom. With that in mind, I want to share information about three important initiatives that we feel will contribute to great learning experiences for children. They are our school safety upgrades, our effort to bring a mental health first aid program to our school district and the mindfulness of our teachers to require our students to make their learning visible as often as possible throughout the school day.

Since 2013, the Hamburg Central School District has worked very hard to enhance safety in our schools, both from a physical plant perspective and from a procedural perspective. From double entry security entrances and enhanced check-in procedures for visitors, to systematic and comprehensive emergency drills for all students, we are doing our best to assure the safety of our students and staff while they are at school. Before the end of October, each child will have participated in an Emergency Evacuation Drill at school, and our entire staff will have participated in Hands-Only CPR training administered by the American Red Cross. With the support of our Board of Education, our school community and our staff, we have been able to bring life to what Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has long established; that the safety and security needs of each child must be met before children

are available for learning.

I am proud to report to you that our Pupil Services Department, in conjunction with our grants developer, won a \$75,000 competi-



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Superintendent

tive grant from the Tower Foundation to bring Mental Health First Aid to the Hamburg Central School District (*see related article on page 4*). Our country's young people are experiencing mental illness with increasing frequency and severity, and we are seeing signs of that trend right here in Hamburg. This initiative, which will begin this winter and continue through the 2017-2018 school year, will help our school staff more effectively recognize the symptoms of mental illness in young people and more quickly link that young person with a person who can help. Training in Mental Health First Aid will begin with our

student services personnel, like counselors and social workers, but will include all staff in 2017-2018. Mental Health First Aid could be offered to our families and to the broader community once our staff has been fully trained.

Finally, I wanted to emphasize the great work that our teachers do to engage students in learning throughout the school day. You can expect to hear from your children at all levels that their teachers are requiring them to "make their learning visible" in a variety of ways. By asking students to "turn and talk" to their neighbor, plan for and participate in a debate, or complete an essay using a Chromebook during class, teachers will require students to make their learning visible. Because each student's learning is visible through activities like these, teachers can make important observations about each student's learning during that class and collect useful data, in real time, that they can use to inform their instruction. The most recent research on the physiology of the brain tells us that making learning visible is a simple way to activate both the frontal and rear lobes of the brain in ways that result in true understanding of concepts and their relationship to the world in which our students live.

As we continue to incorporate improved professional development for our teachers, more instructional technology into our classrooms, and continue to fully establish a positive leadership culture throughout our school district, it is important for us to put the building blocks for great learning firmly in place. Assuring that every child feels safe at school, is healthy and is fully engaged by their teacher in each learning experience by making their learning visible establishes a research-based foundation upon which we can assure that every child has a great learning experience each day through excellence in teaching and leadership.



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