

Education ≠ Entertainment

April 2013

Together as students, staff, families, and community we have successfully cultivated a mutually supportive and respectful school environment. This became quite evident during basketball season, when many people commented to me about the noticeable difference in how we chose to conduct ourselves during games. I even had students tell me that this made them proud to be from Newfield.

To remain consistent with our goal of *taking responsibility for our work and actions*, it is appropriate that we now build on our success by similarly cultivating the high levels of critical thinking and academic rigor that our students are truly capable of achieving. The challenge here is that our students are capable of far more than they actually believe they are capable of, and many are not currently motivated to push the boundaries of their own expectations, let alone to do the work necessary to reach these high expectations.

We educators are working hard to create relevant and rigorous units and lessons. We are working hard to learn how to ask questions, facilitate discussions, and create learning activities that will connect with our students and that will adequately challenge our students to maximize their true potentials. We are **conscious** of what this difficult work entails, we are learning how to **consistently** push ourselves to get better at it, and we are **committed** to doing this work in partnership with our students.

We need more of our students to engage in this learning/teaching partnership. In fact, we need all of them to fully engage. We need all of our students to give up their *point and click* notions of learning/teaching and embrace the complicated, frustrating, and exhilarating habit of focused academic engagement. As Charlotte Danielson asserts, “when students are engaged in learning, they are not merely ‘busy,’ nor are they only ‘on-task.’ Rather, they are intellectually active in learning important and challenging content... That is, they are engaged in discussion, debate, answering ‘what if?’ questions, discovering patterns and the like” (Danielson, C. 2011).

The *I-now* digital world of instant downloads makes it hard to motivate young people to embrace intellectual rigor and academic exercise which is not immediately gratifying or when it is not completed by simply hitting the *send* button. It will take all of us working together to get all of our students to put in the time, energy, and effort necessary to feel the sense of accomplishment and pride that only comes from working through frustrating, confusing, and meaningful learning/teaching. When I think about our school vision of “doing what is best for our community,” I think about our young people. I believe that our young people can learn how to make sense of the complicated world we and they live in and that they can develop the skills and confidence necessary to realize their hopes and dreams. I am asking you to join us in our effort to cultivate the high levels of critical thinking and academic rigor that our students are truly capable of achieving.