

Use common core learning standards to eliminate hunger

By Barry Derfel

The new common core learning standards are often viewed by students, families, educators and community as just one more heavy burden placed on our shoulders for us to carry.

However, we can flip this view by learning how to use them as a means for creating the schools and communities we want.

Here at Newfield High School, we have been working hard to understand what hunger in our community looks like, to learn how this problem has developed over time, and to identify action steps that we can take to eliminate hunger in Newfield. There are many ways that these new standards directly support us in this work.

For example, one of the common core reading standards for grades 11 and 12 states that students will "integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g. visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem." One of the common core speaking and listening standards for grades 11 and 12 states that students will "initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on other's

ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively."

If we provide our students with multiple sources of information about hunger in our community and we bring our students, staff, families and community together to discuss this problem collaboratively, we will be directly addressing these two standards in ways that are both relevant and important.

My hope for this school year is that we educators, students, families, and communities will deepen our understanding of the standards to the point that, collectively, we know them better than the testing companies, textbook publishers and others whose first interest might actually be financial gain or political expediency. As the Rev. Martin Luther King wrote in 1967, "one of the great liabilities of history is that all too many people fail to remain awake through great periods of social change."

With public education in the United States currently at a crossroads, we need to stay awake and actively work to ensure that our public schools nurture our young people and strengthen our communities. This is, after all, why I chose to be a public school educator. I believe this is why most of my colleagues became educators.

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