

## **Focus on Exemplary Education - SHS**

For the past few months, this web article has focused on the budget process. While that is important and must continue to be a priority for our community, it is time we refocus on the important task of providing exemplary education for our students. I asked our new Principal of Stonington High School, Mark Friese, to share some thoughts about the direction of our flagship school. I appreciate Mark's vision and want to share it with you. The following is from Mark Friese...

### **Stonington High School Community**

As we close the 2013-2014 school year, we are already looking forward to the start of the next school year. Our school and community members will be using our Mission Statement as the guide that will focus our attention on student success at Stonington High School:

“The mission of Stonington High School is to foster a lifelong pursuit of a learning in a challenging, motivating, and engaging environment. Upon graduation our students will possess a working plan for post high school life and become responsible and productive citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global society”

We at SHS believe that a positive school culture is the basic foundation of a great school and is a necessity to fulfill our mission. Students will excel, when students are safe, free from distractions, and are in an environment conducive for learning. Constant improvement must be the theme every day. We will all work together to improve achievement and student success each and every day.

To that end, there are three focus areas for SHS next school year:

**Increase Instructional Time:** To meet the high expectations that our students deserve and the school community expects, it is important to increase the time students spend in class. SHS students average seven classes per A/B cycle. One study hall period combined with daily X-Block time puts our students in classes approximately 70% of the time. Instructional time needs to increase in order to improve student learning. Beginning next fall, X-Block will be reduced to 40 minutes. This shorter period (only 18 minutes shorter) will allow our students the necessary time to collaborate, seek academic resources, and keep engaged in their studies. Forty minutes into X-Block, students are typically ready to return to class. We will also be moving lunch to an earlier time between the second and third block of the day. Most of our students are out of the house by 6:25 AM to catch a bus. Currently, they do not eat until about 11:45 AM. That is a long time between breakfast and lunch for young adolescents. Many of our students are extremely hungry by 11:00 AM and that has an adverse affect on learning. If the students eat lunch earlier, that nutrition will help keep them focused during class. Finally, we will be forming a committee next year to evaluate the overall schedule to see how we can provide more instructional minutes for our students. All of these scheduling initiatives are designed to not only increase instructional time, but also to improve the quality of that instructional time. The goal is to always have our students engaged and focused on learning.

**Consistency in Practice:** One area in which we can immediately impact student achievement is by improving our consistency in policies and practices. Subtle differences in how rules and policies are applied can cause confusion and have a negative affect on

students. In addition, we will also be evaluating our assessment practices including homework, posting of grades, and general grading practices. Once again, confusion and inconsistencies are difficult for students to manage. When these very basic elements of school are routine and consistent, the climate will improve and students will be more successful.

**Social Concerns and Climate:** Learning suffers when our students have to deal with distractions throughout the day. Our students are dealing with more and more social distractions on a daily basis. The impact of technology, social media, and the rise of illegal drugs in the region impacts learning. We are constantly dealing with student's use of cell phones and electronic media. Instructional time is valuable and suffers from these distractions. We will be working together as a school community to limit distractions from all sources. We will be evaluating all of our practices on how we deal with cell phones, social media misconduct, cyber-bullying, and drugs in the school. Finally, we will be working with the Stonington Police Department to develop further ways to ensure our school is drug free. It is because we care about our students that we will increase our efforts in this area. It is vital that our students are free of distractions and emotionally ready to learn when they come to school.

The Stonington High School community will focus on these areas with the sole goal of improving student achievement. Through a positive school climate, Stonington High School students will achieve greatness! Stonington High School is ready for this next step.

We ask our students to improve every day, we, as a school should lead by example and also improve every day. We are very fortunate that we are already an outstanding school! We have Dr. Stephen Murphy to thank for guiding us to the position we are in right now. Through his leadership, we have a very strong foundation of rigorous programs and an outstanding staff who are all ready to take the next steps. Thanks Dr. Murphy!

I hope everyone enjoys his or her summer. Looking forward to seeing you around campus!

Mark Friese