

Be Greater than the Average

Tammy Mangus, Superintendent of Schools



@TammyMangus

Dear Member of the Monticello community,

This month, in honor of the “lesser of two evils” (which, as Jerry Garcia would say, is still evil) budget package approved at the last second by our politicians, we will focus on three simple targets:

1. The culture in our buildings determines the success of our students. *Own our culture.*
2. Our day-to-day activities and attitudes become our culture. *Own your attitude and actions.*
3. Regardless of the standards, state assessments or political deals going on, students who read on grade level and can achieve an average score on their math PSAT/SAT are better suited to find success in all areas of education and employment. *Ignore the outside noise, and focus on these fundamental truths.*

I wouldn't bet anything on the success of the governor's current education deal. He stood in front of our great state of NY in February and told us that the APPR debacle we have been witness to for the past three years was nothing short of a bunch of bologna. What he did not realize was that the overall scope of the project, which was littered with subjective criteria, mad-dash SLO creation and negotiations linked to oppressive timelines, steered us too far from what science has told us actually improves educational outcomes: reading level and level of mathematical reasoning.

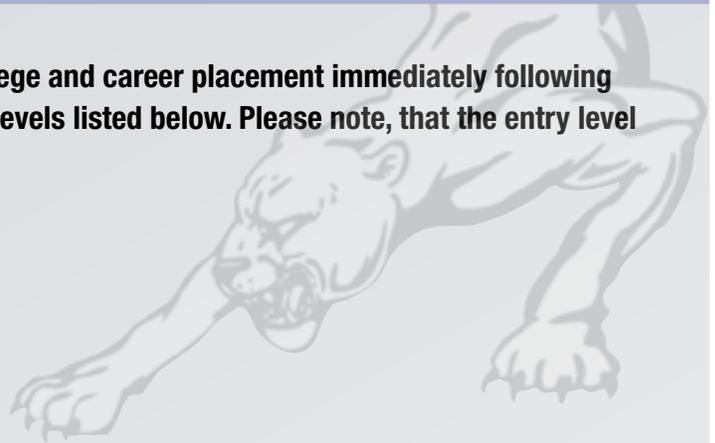
I would hope that our educated politicians would be able to check DECADES of statistical outcomes and simplify to these very base ideals so that we could get back to educating our kiddos, but clearly they need some schooling themselves. So, if they are too dim to focus on these things, we will.

I'd bet everything that our current graduation rate and success rates are DIRECTLY linked to the reading and math levels of our students and our cultural norms. If we all, regardless of our position, hunker down, decide that the children in our system will grow in these two fundamental skills, and attack EVERY issue (from discipline to parent outreach and communication) with this in mind, we will beat this asinine, misconstrued, overly-complicated, politically-charged mess, and I have proof of that.

Some information on which to focus:

- A Lexile level of 1200 is a good target for college and career placement immediately following high school. Our current 8th grade is reading at the levels listed below. Please note, that the entry level for 9th grade is approximately 900.

Number of Students	Lexile Range
42	Below 600
18	Between 600-700
64	Between 700-900
94	Above 900



- When we started on this Common Core ride in 2012, we focused on student GROWTH. The result has been a cultural shift, and here are the results for our 6th and 7th graders:

2012-2013 (Grade 6)

Subject	Percentile Rank	Straight Rank
ELA	12.5	618th out of 705 districts
Math	7	655th out of 705 districts

2013-2014 (Grade 7)

Subject	Percentile Rank	Straight Rank
ELA	19.3	555th out of 688 districts
Math	23.8	524th out of 688 districts

- The current 8th grade has grown exponentially. This grade level serves as an example of the rest of our system. Our Monticello students are more prepared than they have ever been before. Our students do not need business as usual. They don't need the political nonsense provided and measured by the NYS budget deal.

What they do need is a community willing to believe that growth in reading level and mathematical reading skills is eminent. Why? Because the one thing that we know, without question, is that these basic skills will define adult success.

Yes, folks, the standardized testing movement and overregulation, which began with the No Child Left Behind act in 2002, coupled with testing, testing and more testing, has done little for our nation's economy. Why? Because instead of focusing on simple, foundational learning targets, like using reading and mathematical reasoning level checks to measure student learning success, we have built a house of cards. It sure looks like a magnificent structure with all its fancy-shmancy "accountability" and "regulation" benchmarks, but it will never stand up when our students are asked to put their skills to the real test called life.

And so, Governor Cuomo, what do you do when a system shows an overwhelming lack of success? When statistics and research regarding our economic standing and correlations between reading level and adult success are clear as day and only a few clicks away? When that research and those statistics show that heightened regulations, testing accountability and overcomplicated outcome expectations are all nothing more than a bunch of tomfoolery packaged with a pretty bow? I know what you did...You built a triple-decker bologna sandwich. Shame on you. Higher accountability has led to failure. It has had a negative impact on our economy and our nation. Why? It sets up a system of pass or fail. Students caught up in the “non-proficient” zone for years on end, never get a second chance. They wind up failing for good, trapped in menial wage jobs or unemployed altogether. How can we allow this to keep happening?

Now, dear Governor, don't think for one second that I believe that there should be no accountability. Quite frankly, nothing could be further from the truth. I simply believe that the accountability measures should be simplified. Each and every year, schools - not the state - should, at several points, check in on the growth of student reading and mathematical reasoning skill levels. If a child, regardless of the starting point, is not growing at an acceptable rate, a team of highly skilled specialists should deliver targeted instruction to these students for additional time outside of the regular school day in before and after school programs. This way, the spirited liberal arts programming that has provided our nation with creativity and empowered us to become the land of opportunity can continue, with EVERY student involved, during the regular school day.

If schools in any system continue to fail AT GROWING STUDENTS with these intervention investments after three years, (as shown at strategic points - not every year - by reading and math assessment measures already in existence, backed by tried and true research, like the NAEP, PISA, SRI, IOWA, SAT, ACT or CAT assessments), then swoop in and propose your fix for that district.

Our money should be invested in helping our students grow forward instead of developing assessments, SLO's and APPR's to prove they aren't in order to punish accordingly. It is elementary, my dear Governor. Two last questions you should ask yourself: What were my advisors thinking, and how much did I pay them?

As for our Monticello Team, let's hunker down and focus on this month's three simple targets.

Be well,

**Tammy Mangus
Superintendent of Schools**