

Local Schools



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PBHS Graduation Rate Exceeds 90% Goal

OCTOBER 05TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Poplar Bluff, Missouri - Poplar Bluff High School's graduation rate was 91.8 percent this year, a gain of 4.2 percent over last year, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education recently reported.

School officials attribute the steady increase since 2011's 78.6 percent to the progress teachers are making in tracking data, building relationships, and generally working harder to engage students and ensure individuals obtain the knowledge necessary to advance.

"Much credit should be given to high school staff for their efforts during the student's final four years," affirmed Patty Robertson, R-I assistant superintendent of curriculum. "However, this is reason for all of us to celebrate. We begin laying an academic foundation and helping students to form dispositions about learning as early as 3 years old."

The Professional Learning Community model was one district-wide initiative implemented over the past several years that has built time into the academic calendar for educators to collaborate across subject areas, grade levels and school buildings. Capturing Kids' Hearts is the cultural piece that centers on building a positive discourse with students by establishing social contracts, among other tools, in various school settings.

The digital transformation, through which a district laptop has been supplied to each student, began at the Junior High and expanded to the High School, allowing teachers to supplement their lessons with educational resources available online that are vetted by

instructional coaches.

The Graduation Center allows students at risk of falling behind grade level due to various life circumstances a chance to catch up in a smaller classroom setting. Because of its success, school leaders are in the planning stages of expanding the non-traditional program into a full alternative school for students who do not excel in a typical campus environment.

Other opportunities tailored to upper grade levels include advisory during which students are provided a class period to check in with a designated teacher and meet with ‘lifeguards’ in each department if they are struggling to grasp a concept. The ICU, or intensive care unit, is a parental notification system utilized when students miss assignments.

Lastly, PB Writes is an activity that puts an emphasis on research and essay writing across all core subjects with monthly prompts designed to prepare freshmen and sophomores for the EOC and upperclassmen for the ACT.

“None of this makes [school] easier, it makes it more student-focused, giving kids opportunities they didn’t have before,” stated Mike Owen, PBHS principal. “These are extra things our staff and students are doing. The easy route would be to sit back and do what’s always been done.”

Owen, a first-year high school principal with five years of administrative experience in secondary education, noted that his pet peeve is what he refers to as the “phantom rule,” or things that are done a particular way simply out of routine. Crediting his predecessor Mike Kiehne for implementing many of the aforementioned initiatives, Owen said he believes the stage is set for him to make the necessary tweaks to improve programs, as his specialty is attention to detail.

“I’ve been in the district for 20 years and this high school did not always have the reputation that it has now,” said Owen, referring to all the dropout prevention measures being implemented today. A total of 340 students earned diplomas in the Class of 2017, marking the largest graduating class since 1980, according to district records.

“We are now a strength for the district,” Owen continued. “Our efforts are being noticed, and the results are showing.”

Pictured: Prior to commencement in May, members of the graduating Class of 2017 visit O’Neal in their gowns, an annual tradition at each of the elementary schools across the district.

Photo and article submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

LAST UPDATED ON OCTOBER 05TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

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