

Local Schools



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Superintendent Spends Day as High School Student

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Poplar Bluff Superintendent Scott Dill could be spotted in plain clothes with a school-issued backpack off Barron Road at a quarter to 7 a.m. on a brisk autumn Thursday, waiting for the bus to pick him up... to go to Senior High.

He contemplated what may pose the biggest challenge for him at this stage in life, such as skipping that second cup of coffee in order to limit his fluid intake.

Despite the careful consideration, he failed to bring something to write in and had to visit the Giving Closet for a notebook first thing, according to assistant librarian Cindy Webb.

Dill was provided a full class schedule because he committed to spending an entire day as a PBHS student.

“As a superintendent, I’m afforded the opportunity to make decisions every day that impact the lives of kids, and my focus—in concert with the administration and board—is, and has to be, what’s best for students,” said Dill in an interview the day before his experiment. “My goal is to become better attuned to the needs of our kids and have a deeper appreciation for what their lives within our school system entail.

What he learned quickly was students were rather interested in what he was up to and why. Zac Batton, who was alerted in advance by Dill’s teenage daughter, said he thought the bus ride in particular was “pretty cool.” Zac, a senior, was rumored that Dill had Spanish II with him, considering he heard the superintendent took German in high school.

Attending concert choir class together, sophomore Caitlin Dollins was curious to see if Dill really could sight read the music. And while the superintendent was fully prepared to eat alone, Caitlin ended up welcoming him to her table.

“A couple friends of mine had the idea to invite him to sit with us at lunch if he had D lunch, so I made sure to ask him before anyone else could get the chance to ask,” Caitlin explained. “I really wanted to get his opinion of what was going on in the school system, but I didn’t want to make him feel uncomfortable or different, as that wouldn’t really be in the spirit of the project. So we just talked about classes and which teachers he liked.”

One assignment that Dill found invigorating, he noted, was when he had to write an essay in Mike Sowatzke’s American history class about whether he believed industrialist Andrew Carnegie was a hero or a villain. Dill felt the correct answer was probably a combination, but he was challenged to pick a side to compose a more cohesive analysis.

Having served in a leadership capacity for so long, Dill realized he had grown accustomed to helping solve real world problems and had forgotten what it is like to engage in an intellectual exercise for the sole sake of learning, he mentioned.

Sowatzke was excited for the opportunity to leave an impression on his boss, he said, and then he remembered it was his department’s week to participate in PB Writes in preparation for EOC and ACT testing. Rather than delivering an engaging lesson, the instructor ended up spending the majority of time bouncing from desk to desk answering students’ questions, but that is part of the profession, too.

“It’s good for people to see all the stuff we have to do in a given day to keep everyone on task,” Sowatzke commented, and reflected on what has changed since his secondary education a decade ago. “Instead of a teacher’s role just being teacher—you get your grade and that’s it—we are actively watching out to make sure kids aren’t failing.”

In a follow-up interview, Dill stated this experience would live with him forever, which was especially important to him considering he graduated from high school in the western part of the state – roughly a quarter of a century ago. While today’s technology integration equips faculty with more tools at their disposal, he observed, quality instruction is still quality instruction.

“We really have good teachers doing good work,” Dill pointed out. “Some people that I had previously considered reserved or quiet came alive in front of a classroom, and I got

to see them at their brilliant best, helping kids.”

After several 47-minute periods with six minutes in between, and only a 25-minute lunch break, Dill said he felt like he had run a marathon, constantly shifting subjects as well as dispositions. While he gathered his belongings to go home, some students were gearing up for basketball practice, and various other extracurricular activities on campus.

“Whoever said, ‘Youth is wasted on the young,’ hasn’t put in their academic day in a while,” Dill joked. “And we ask our students to do this day in and day out, rain or shine – for 13 school years.

“It could truly enhance a person’s ability to effectively facilitate the education and protection of our kids if we were to walk a mile in their shoes, which I have done today,” said Dill, reaffirming his earlier sentiment, perhaps with a touch more conviction this time around.

Pictured: Superintendent Scott Dill (maroon hoodie) practices songs for the Community Thanksgiving Dinner with concert choir students in music teacher Joshua Allen’s class.

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

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