Bond Issue School Facility Improvements
Progressing Nicely

Happy New Year! We are pleased to report that the work to renovate our school facilities, as outlined in the bond issue that was recently approved by our community, is moving along very well. As you can imagine, there is a significant amount of planning to do in order to complete the work.

The major accomplishments so far are:

• The initial school bonds were sold, generating $108 million of revenue for the first phase of renovation. We are pleased to report that, due to the efficient work of staff and school experts, we were able to attain an interest rate on the bonds almost 1 percent lower than other schools and communities that were hit by a change in the municipal bond market. This action will save several million dollars of interest over the life of the bonds.

• An expert team of architects and construction managers has been assembled to help oversee the project. These firms were chosen through a competitive bidding process.

• Fourteen district committees, representing more than 200 people, have been assembled to help with the final decision making on the renovation plans.

• Each school also has a committee to provide feedback on the renovation planning process.

• The first five buildings to be renovated this summer have been chosen. They are: Cleveland Elementary School, Coolidge Elementary School, Rosedale Elementary School, Cooper Upper Elementary School, and Frost Middle School. These schools were chosen based on facility renovation needs and they are located in all geographic areas of our district.

• Schematic designs have been drawn for this first phase of renovation, and school and district committees have had a chance to review the initial plans.

• The first round of school buses and custodial equipment has been purchased.

There is much to do this winter in preparation for the first schools to be renovated this summer, including finalizing the drawings, receiving state approval, bidding all the construction work, and preparing schools for the renovation.

We are excited to see this first wave of major renovations in our schools. It will be a significant improvement in our learning environments. We have much more information on our website about the progress of our bond issue work. Please go to www.livoniapublicschools.org and click on the “Updates Bond 2013” icon located at the top-right side of the page, to review the information about our progress.

Dr. Randy A. Liepa, Superintendent

Look inside for news on the great things that are happening in our schools and with our students!
Welcome Information

Are You New to the LPS Community?

If you are new to the community, welcome! We would like to introduce you to our schools and programs. Please contact the Communications office at 734-744-2522, and visit us online for information for new families at www.livoniapublicschools.org.

Is Your Child Not Quite Ready for Kindergarten?

Consider the Young Fives Program!

If your child has a fall birthday and is not quite ready for kindergarten, consider Young Fives! This program is designed for students who are eligible for kindergarten, but they require the gift of time to further develop their emotional, social, physical and/or cognitive skills. The program is tuition-free, as it is funded by the State. Young Fives is housed at the Jackson Early Childhood Center. Children attend five days per week in either the AM or PM session, and follow the LPS calendar. Fee-supported childcare is available within the building during the before and after school hours. Eligible children must be five years old between July 1 and October 1, 2014. For further information, please call 734-744-2813 or visit www.livoniapublicschools.org/jackson and select Young Fives under “Programs”.

2014-2015 Young Fives Information Meeting –March 24, 6:30-7:30 p.m. at Jackson Center – 32025 Lyndon, Livonia. Registration begins March 26 at 8:00 a.m.

School-Age Childcare Programs (SACC)

For more information, please call 734-744-2813 ext. 22130, or find us on the district website under “Programs”.

• Before and After School Childcare
• Summer Activity Club

Perrinville Early Childhood Center

28201 Lyndon, Livonia 734-744-2765

• Early On developmental screenings for infants and toddlers from birth to 36 months
• Preschool Programs for Children ages 3 to 5 years with special needs
• Hearing and Vision Screenings for Children ages 3 to 5 years
• Kids First Great Start Readiness Program
• Parent Education Programs

Jackson Early Childhood Center

32025 Lyndon, Livonia 734-744-2813

• Preschool Enrichment for 3 and 4 year olds
• Childcare with a Preschool Component: Five days per week, year round
• Young Fives Childcare (before and after Young Fives program)
• School-Age Childcare

School Closing Information

If an LPS school is closed for any reason, school closure information will be posted:

Online: www.livoniapublicschools.org

On LPS Cable TV Channels: Channel 15 (Brighthouse Networks and WOW) and 19 (Comcast)

On Detroit TV Stations: WDIV, WJBK, and WXYZ

On AM Radio Stations: WWJ-950

To sign up for a text alert and/or email notification, visit: www.livoniapublicschools.org. Under “Quick Links”, select Sign Up For E-News.

All school activities and sporting events will be canceled in the event that a school is closed.

All-Day Kindergarten Registration Begins February 5

Kindergarten registration begins February 5 at all elementary schools. Please contact your child’s future school for more information. Kindergartners must be five years old by or before October 1, 2014. Kindergarten roundup will be held at all schools on May 15 (specific times to be announced). If you are uncertain which school your child will attend, please contact the Communications office at 734-744-2522.

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To contact the LPS Communications office, please call (734) 744-2522, or email Katie Patterson at kpatters@livoniapublicschools.org.

Livonia Public Schools
Purpose • Passion • Pride
LPS Receives Top Rating in Financial Audit

The Livonia Public Schools Board of Education received good news during the annual financial audit presentation by the district’s auditing firm, Plante Moran, for the 2012-2013 school year.

LPS earned an “unmodified” opinion, which is the highest level of assessment an auditing firm can award. The same findings held true on an audit of federal programs, according to Teresa Pollock, a partner at Plante Moran, who presented the audit report to the board on Nov. 18, 2013.

“Based on our audit tests and procedures, we believe the financial statements are materially correct and all of the presentations and accounting principles do conform to generally accepted accounting principles,” said Pollock.

The general fund revenues at fiscal year end, in June 2013, were $143.3 million, with 87% of that amount coming from the state per-pupil foundation allowance. Other revenue sources include local and federal funding.

General fund expenditures at fiscal year’s end totaled $144.9 million, with salaries and employee benefits accounting for 88% of expenditures.

The district’s fund balance, or “rainy day fund,” stands at $6.7 million, which is 4.65% of the general fund. The state average for fund balances is at 11% and auditors generally recommend them to be about 15% of the general fund.

Superintendent Randy Liepa said the district is “a little anxious” about the fund balance, but noted the steady decrease in per pupil funding over the years has left few options. The district has seen its funding decrease by $30 million since 2007.

“For us to be able to survive that period of time and protect the programs that are in place is certainly a testament to our employees,” said Liepa. “We’re pleased with where we’re at, when we look at the loss of revenue that we’ve had. We’re hopeful that, at some point in time, this turns around for us.”

Visit www.livoniapublicschools.org to view the complete financial audit.

Staff News

Weaver Named Region’s Social Worker of the Year

Livonia Public Schools Elementary Student Assistance Provider Kathy Weaver was selected as the Michigan Association of School Social Workers “Region A School Social Worker of the Year.” Weaver, who is in her second year as the ESAP at Johnson Upper Elementary, said she is honored to receive this award. Weaver was previously the school social worker at Johnson, and has been with LPS for 13 years.

Hage Receives George Lovich State Award of Merit

Churchill High School Athletic Director Marc Hage has been issued the George Lovich State Award of Merit in Michigan. The George Lovich State Award of Merit is presented to an athletic director who is presently a member in good standing of the MIAAA and the NIAAA and to someone who has shown long-term contributions, leadership and meritorious service to the profession of interscholastic athletics at the state and/or national level.

Hage has been with Livonia Public Schools since 1990 and athletic director at Churchill High School since 1996. He is responsible for more than 1,100 student athletes and 44 coaches each year at CHS.

Continuous Improvement is the Focus of LPS Lean Projects

In an economic climate in which doing more with less is “the new normal,” Livonia Public Schools is striving to be more efficient than ever before. However, the district isn’t taking a traditional approach to improving its processes.

In its third year of using “Lean” tools and methods that are well known in the private sector, LPS is well on its way to being more efficient and effective, while providing a higher level of value to stakeholders. The tools and principles of Lean reduce waste and create efficiencies across the school district.

LPS is one of very few school districts in the state to apply Lean principles to a K-12 education organization. More than 80 district administrators have completed an orientation to Lean, and presentations were made to more than 900 teaching and support staff members.

Thus far, the Lean continuous improvement process has been used in two focus areas: the process of selecting and placing substitute teachers; and the student registration process. Three separate multi-stakeholder Kaizen teams are working to improve those processes. Kaizen is a Japanese term meaning “change for the better.”

One pillar of Lean is respect for people – calling upon employees who do the work to be involved in recommending improvements. In LPS, one full year of focus on the substitute teacher placement process has yielded significant results. The second summer of centralized student registration also produced gains in standardized processes, efficiencies and customer service.

“Ultimately, it’s about increasing customer value, for our students, our parents and our community,” said Dr. Randy Liepa, Livonia Public Schools superintendent. “Our progress on these focus areas doesn’t stop, either. We’re continually looking for ways to improve upon the improvements.”

Visit www.livoniapublicschools.org to view the complete financial audit.
Spotlight on Students and Schools

District Awarded Health and Fitness Grants

September was an exciting month for the Livonia Public Schools’ health and fitness programs. The district was awarded two grants totaling $1.445 million, to be put toward efforts to improve physical education.

Cass Elementary School was the recipient of one of the grants, in the amount of $50,000. The Building Healthy Communities grant was awarded by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, the Center for School Health at Wayne State University, the Michigan Fitness Foundation, and the United Dairy Industry of Michigan. The funds will be used for healthy initiatives such as physical education and recess equipment, curriculum materials, classroom activities, library books, and healthy after-school activities.

The second grant – worth $1.395 million – was awarded to the district as a whole by the U.S. Department of Education. The grant is designed to improve physical education curriculum and instruction, school-wide physical activity opportunities, and nutrition messaging for middle and high school students.

The funds will be disbursed over three years, with each of the three years focusing on a specific aspect of launching the improved curriculum. The first year will focus on curriculum innovation, and will primarily center on providing staff the necessary professional development and equipment. The second and third years will focus on integrating the new methods into the curriculum. Culturally relevant fitness methods such as yoga and CrossFit will be implemented into classes, and new technology will be utilized to improve instruction and assessment.

Johnson Students Give Peace More Than a Chance

With a song of peace in the air and two white doves flying overhead, students at Johnson Upper Elementary were reminded that peace matters. Celebrating International Day of Peace, students at Johnson gathered for a choral performance and the release of two white doves.

Principal DeAnn Urso told the students that remembering the importance of peace isn’t just a one-day celebration. “Let’s remember it always, not just today,” she said. “Let’s sustain it – keep it with us, as we keep moving forward.”

Kathy Weaver, who is the Elementary Student Assistance Provider at Johnson, organized the Peace Day, which also included the decorating of rocks that were placed in a peace rock garden by the school’s peace pole. “This is really an extension of our behaviors,” she said. “This allows our students to make a commitment to each other and to the world, to be peaceful.”

Leader in Me School List Grows in LPS

Three schools in the district are taking leadership to the next level, by being designated as Leader in Me schools. The first to take the challenge was Cooper Upper Elementary, a few years ago. Joining in this positive effort this year are Randolph and Cleveland elementary schools and Emerson Middle School.

More than just a slogan, Leader in Me is a mindset and a way of life at these schools, where students learn to take responsibility for themselves by being productive and goal-oriented. This is accomplished by following Stephen Covey’s The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, a #1 best seller that’s catching on in the education world. More than 600 schools worldwide are using The Leader in Me process.

SHS Alumni Sought for School’s 50th Anniversary

Calling all Stevenson High School grads! Plans are in the works to celebrate the school’s 50th anniversary with a four-day event, October 21-24, 2015.

The Stevenson Alumni Association is looking for members. To sign up, visit www.livoniapublicschools.org/ShsAlumniCfm and click on the Stevenson Alumni Association link. It’s free to join.

A Facebook page has also been set up under “Livonia Stevenson Alumni,” and a Twitter account will be set up soon.

The celebration plans include local activities on Wednesday, Oct. 21, 2015. The association is hoping to offer SHS alumni special rates at area businesses and recreational facilities. A rededication of the high school’s auditorium, library media center and football field are planned for Oct. 22, 2015. The big homecoming football game, versus Churchill High School, will be held on Friday, Oct. 23, 2015 and an All Class Reunion open house will be held on Saturday, Oct. 24, 2015 on the Stevenson High School campus. Watch for updates on the Facebook page and the SHS Alumni Association web page.

TRW Continues Legacy of Support for LPS

Livonia Public Schools continues to enjoy excellent partnerships with local businesses. One supporter of the school district is TRW Automotive, which donates annually to the LPS early literacy initiatives. Over the past 14 years, TRW has contributed $68,500 to LPS for this purpose.

The district takes great care in using these funds to support early literacy by purchasing supplemental materials and learning aids. It’s only through community partnerships such as this that the district can continue to grow these important programs that build a strong foundation for our youngest readers.

LPS thanks TRW for its continued support and generosity.
**Kennedy Students Send ‘Thank You’ Letters to Veterans**

“America Rules!”
“Thank you for protecting us!”
“Thank you for giving us freedom!”

These are just some of the thoughts students at Kennedy Elementary wrote in their “thank you” letters to veterans, in honor of Veterans Day on Nov. 11.

“We owe them a lot,” said Ryan Trottier, a third grader at Kennedy who initiated the project with his dad, Dale Trottier.

More than 150 letters were delivered to veterans in area hospitals, as part of the national effort called LOVE (Letters Owed Veterans Everywhere). The Trottiers became aware of the LOVE project last year, just a few days before Veterans Day.

The letters were first delivered to the VFW Livonia Post 3941, where Post Commander Gerald Genette was most appreciative.

“A lot of veterans have no family to come and visit them,” he said. “So, anything we can do to make them happier, we’ll do.”

Ryan Trottier’s grandfathers are veterans, so it was a special visit to the VFW Post to see the uniforms and medals that are on display.

**Schools Put the ‘Good’ Times in Goodfellows Food Drive**

School hallways lined with boxes of food – it’s a common sight at the holidays in Livonia Public Schools.

This year, Rosedale Elementary nearly quadrupled its donation to the Livonia Goodfellows by turning the collection into a Youth Making a Difference project for second grade students.

Students and staff put a lot of “spirit” into the donation, thanks to the coordination by second-grade teachers Sandi Benson and Jan Madaus. They thought a little motivation would go a long way in the food drive, and they were right. They hosted a Rosedale Spirit Week to really kick in the giving spirit.

Students in all grades were encouraged to participate in fun Spirit Week-themed days in exchange for donating canned or other non-perishable food items or 50 cents. During the week, students were able to wear pajamas and hats to school, bring a stuffed animal from home, choose their seat in the lunchroom and even receive a bag of popcorn on the special Popcorn Day.

The teachers also worked in lessons about community service and giving back, which added value and meaning for the students who participated in the food drive.

Bill Heaton, president of the Livonia Goodfellows, said efforts such as this – and those at the other Livonia schools – make the program successful.

“With all of the schools participating, we’d like to give them all credit,” said Heaton. “It’s not going to happen automatically. We get all of our canned and boxed food from the schools.”

This year, the Livonia Goodfellows served 340 families. They received food boxes, clothing vouchers, a gift card to Stan’s Market, toys for children 11 and under, and vouchers for the older children.

**Help us Find Our 2014-2015 Teachers of the Year**

Livonia Public Schools is searching for its 2014-2015 Teachers of the Year at both the elementary (K-6) and secondary (7-12) levels. A Teacher of the Year committee comprised of teachers, administrators, and residents has formed to select the designees to be announced in June. Nominees must possess exemplary personal qualifications, professional skills, and records of school/community service. In addition, they should be employed by Livonia Public Schools and they should spend at least half of their time in instruction.

To submit a nomination for a teacher, please do so online at [www.livoniapublicschools.org/toyform](http://www.livoniapublicschools.org/toyform). If you do not have online access, please contact Stacy Jenkins at 734-744-2533 to have a nomination form mailed to you. Nominations are due by February 28, 2014.

For up-to-date information visit: [livoniapublicschools.org](http://livoniapublicschools.org)
Incoming 9th Grade Parent Nights

Livonia Public Schools’ three high schools will host Parent Nights for all current 8th grade students and their families. Private and parochial school students are also invited to attend.

Information will include: academic programs; elective offerings and scheduling options; information about high school magnet programs, including Global Education, International Baccalaureate Program (IB), Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA), the Math, Science and Computer Program (MSC), Culinary Arts Program, Career Intern Program and Career Technical Center.

Churchill High School    January 29, 2014    7:00 p.m.
Begins in Auditorium with welcome. For more information, call the Scheduling Office at 734-744-2650 ext. 46111

Franklin High School     January 23, 2014    7:00 p.m.
A 6:15 p.m. session is scheduled for families not currently enrolled at Emerson Middle School. Begins in Auditorium with a welcome. For more information, contact Ms. Esparza at 734-744-2655 ext. 47118

Stevenson High School    February 6, 2014    7:00 p.m.
Begins in Auditorium with welcome. For more information, call Mr. Harper at 734-744-2660 ext. 48113

Admissions for Gifted and Talented Students Outlined

The Webster ACAT program is now taking nominations for the 2014-2015 school year. Elementary-aged students who have outstanding academic achievement and ability may benefit from a specialized academic program.

Livonia Public Schools has a program dedicated to providing gifted and talented students a nurturing, differentiated, rigorous, and enriched curriculum. Students have opportunities for essential interaction between children with like abilities, interests, and talents. The program is called ACAT (Alternative Classrooms for the Academically Talented) and is housed in Webster School, 32401 Pembroke, Livonia 48152. The nomination and application process for the 2014-2015 school year is beginning now for students who are currently in kindergarten through fourth grade and reside within the Livonia Public Schools school district. Applications are available at each district elementary school and online at the Livonia Public Schools’ website. Applications may be returned to Webster through February 7, 2014.

If you have any questions regarding the program, please contact Webster Elementary School at 734-744-2795 ext. 31450, or you may email the ACAT Teacher Facilitator, Ben Hillard, at bhillard@livoniapublicschool.org.

Global Education Program Deadline

Incoming 9th Grade LPS Students and 9th Grade Non-Public Students Living Within LPS Boundaries

The School of Global Education is open on a limited basis for students whose home high school is Churchill High School or Franklin High School.

Consideration for admission into this program is available online at www.livoniapublicschools.org/globaled.

A random drawing will be held to determine who enters the program if the interest is greater than the seats available. The deadline for submitting an interest form is February 1, 2014. If you have any questions about the Global Education Program, please contact Judy Bergeski at the Global Education Office at 734-744-2660 ext. 48828.

Career Technical Center Offers Vocational Classes

The Livonia Public Schools School District offers vocational education programs at the Livonia Career Technical Center and at Churchill, Franklin and Stevenson high schools. These programs are designed to prepare youth for a broad range of employment and training services. Below is a list of programs being offered this year and the criteria for admission.

All vocational education programs follow the district’s policies of nondiscrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, height, weight, marital status, handicap or disability in all activities and employment. In addition, arrangements can be made to ensure that the lack of English language skills is not a barrier to admission or participation.

For general information about these programs, contact:

Dr. Janet Haas, Principal
Livonia Career Technical Center
8985 Newburgh  Livonia, MI 48150
734-744-2816

The Livonia Public Schools School District prohibits unlawful discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, height, weight, marital status, handicap, or disability in any of its educational programs or activities. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the nondiscrimination policies: Director of Human Resources, 15125 Farmington Road, Livonia, MI 48154, 734-744-2500.

Grade Status Criteria for Admission

Program                   Grade
-------------------------  ----------
Acc. Business Tech Management  10–12
Architectural Technology   11–12
Automotive Technology 1 & 2  11–12
Building Trades           11–12
Business Tech. Management  10–12
Computer Service Technician 11–12
Criminal Justice Technology 11–12
E-Commerce Social Media Management 10–12
Engineering Technology    11–12
Fashion Merchandising 1 & 2 11–12
Graphic Design 1 & 2       11–12
Hospitality Management 1 & 2 10–12
Management & Business Administration 11–12
Marketing                 10–12
Marketing II              10–12
Marketing III             11–12
Medical Assistant 1 & 2    11–12
Medical Occupations       11–12
Mobile Apps               11–12
Network Administrator     11–12
Project Design Management 10–12
Residential Construction  11–12
Sports and Entertainment Marketing 11–12
Sports Medicine           11–12
Web Site Administration 1 & 2 11–12
Foundation Support for LPS keeps Growing

The LPS Education Foundation is stronger than ever, with continuous corporate and community support that reaches far to assist Livonia Public Schools students, families and educators.

The district is fortunate to have this growing support of the Foundation, which is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing financial assistance for innovative programs and services in Livonia Public Schools.

In keeping with that focus, the Foundation recently started a new and exciting teacher grant program. In total, 12 teachers received a combined $25,000 to use for innovative teaching strategies, projects and programs in their classrooms. The grants will benefit the district’s youngest preschoolers, all the way up through high school students. They will be used for a variety of projects, including a World Music Drumming program at Grant Elementary; digital story-telling, using mini iPads; support for the Leader in Me initiatives and more.

Coinciding with the grant program this past fall, the Foundation also unveiled its new logo and its official new name, the LPS Education Foundation, as an outward sign of its strong pledge to supporting quality education provided by Livonia Public Schools.

“Our primary focus to date has been to fund the Competitive Edge College Saving Plan, which continues to be the premier program offered by the Foundation,” said Foundation president Diane Policelli.

That program offers a Section 529 college savings account for each new kindergarten student enrolled in the Livonia Public Schools. The Competitive Edge plan establishes an educational trust account for participating students and a donation from the Foundation is deposited in their accounts. Over 1,000 students presently have this unique savings account.

Both programs only exist due to the generous contributions by community partners, including: Alpha Group; Bill Brown Ford, Inc.; Bright House Networks, LLC; Cheryl Bowker Agency – Allstate Insurance; DFCU Financial; LPS Employees; LPS PTAs/PTSA’s; Michigan Educational Credit Union; Michigan Educational Savings Plan – TIAA-CREF; The Orthodontics Office of Dr. Shaw and Dr. Jane; Parkside Credit Union; Ralph Thayer Automotive; Roush Industries; St. Mary Mercy Hospital – Livonia; St. Mary’s Cultural and Banquet Center; TRW Automotive; Westland Shopping Center

“We are very thankful for the many individuals and institutions that have contributed to the Foundation over the past years,” Policelli said.

The primary fund-raisers for the Foundation are the luncheon (sponsored by St. Mary Mercy Hospital – Livonia and St. Mary’s Cultural and Banquet Center) and a carnival-like Bounce Back to School event in August.

From Teacher of the Year John Santi

As the holidays have passed and we have started the new year, we are reaching the half-way mark of the school year. While many students started the school year on a high note and have had continued success, others may be struggling or are starting to lose interest in their education. What can we as parents and teachers do to help our children stay motivated and continue down the path of academic success? More than you think!

At the elementary level, parent-teacher conferences occur in November after the first marking period. This means that you could go the remainder of the school year without talking to your child’s teacher. If your child’s performance has begun to slip, it is time to reestablish the lines of communication with the teacher. As teachers, we welcome the support and the chance to discuss your child’s progress.

It also might be a good time to reevaluate your student’s organizational skills. Are they filling out their Student Assignment Book daily? Are they bringing home graded work on a regular basis? If not, it’s time for an extreme homework makeover! According to the journal on Teaching Exceptional Children, “Students’ disorganization, including their inability to keep track of assignments and turn them in on time, can contribute to low grades and academic failure...” In many cases, one homework folder is all your child needs. One side of the folder is the “Keep at Home” section and the other side is the “Bring Back to School” section. There is no need for multiple folders and binders. Also, I tell my students that they should be able to walk their parents through the Student Assignment Book daily and explain what we did in each subject area. It should give you, the parent, a good idea what we did on that school day, and it opens up the dialogue between you and your child.

What else can you do to reignite the spark in your child? How about an extracurricular activity? This could be in school (Battle of the Books, Chess Club, All-School Play), or out of school such as dance, basketball, or swimming. A study by the U. S. Department of Education revealed that students who participate in co-curricular activities are three times more likely to have a grade point average of 3.0 or better than students who do not participate in co-curricular activities. Extracurricular activities also require time management on the part of the student. They know their daily schedule and the window they have to complete their homework.

Besides communication, there are some other things that can be done to motivate your child. This can include celebrating past successes. It is human nature for us as parents to dwell on the negative, but every child shows successes in some aspect of the curriculum. Remind them of those achievements and the steps they took to reach them as a tool to refocus. If they have had previous success, why can’t they be successful again?

Finally, remember to be patient with your child. Set realistic goals and expectations. Every child learns differently and at different rates. What might not make sense in December may begin to click later in the year. Either way, just knowing that you and the teacher are there for their academic and social growth can often help students through occasional rough patches.
I'm often asked during conferences for strategies that parents can implement at home to help motivate their son or daughter. Regardless of the grade level or subject, my response to this question is almost always the same. Motivation must be grounded in the principles of promoting values of learning and fostering high expectations. In fact, high expectations that allow students to see that success is the natural result of hard work coupled with a strong value for learning constitutes two-thirds of Vroom’s Expectancy equation, which is the motivational theory I most often employ with students, as well as my own children.

During the 1960’s, Victor Vroom constructed a motivational theory that links Motivational Force to Instrumentality, Valence and Expectancy. In the student/academic context, student motivation is dependent upon possessing specific skills needed to perform a given task (instrumentality), a value of the task or topic (valence) and the self-held expectation that effort will result in success (expectancy). This equation raises questions as to how parents can effectively maximize their time and effort with their children at home, beyond mere skills-based practice.

When working with kids at home it is very easy to look for the quickest path to a desired end. Often, this path focuses on specific skills. Skills acquisition, however, only represents one-third of the equation and cannot stand alone as a long-term recipe for success and motivation. This is not to say that skills practice should be abandoned at home. In order to maximize the overall benefits, homework or practice time should focus on much more than just the skills. Such time represents a wonderful opportunity to take advantage of subtle actions and rituals that will encourage your child to build a strong value structure and set expectations for their long term success. Time and effort invested in such activities can be used to build a culture of knowledge acquisition through which you and your child will share a value for learning and set high, shared expectations for growth.

One surefire way to build a strong sense of value for learning is by simply demonstrating that your child’s academic success is a priority to you and to the entire family. The repeated act of designating a specific time for homework and skills sends a clear message that academics take precedence over activities, athletics, socialization and entertainment. This message will not be lost on your child.

As parents, we must constantly be vigilant to avoid transferring our own limitations onto our child during homework or practice time. We’ve all had our challenges during our own academic careers. Simple statements like, “I was never any good at math when I was in school,” can allow your child a pre-existing excuse and potentially lower their internal sense of expectation within mathematics.

Collaboration and communication are essential elements for building a sense of value and expectations. Work to promote a collaborative relationship between your family and the school, while emphasizing that the student is the key element within the collaborative relationship. Discuss emails sent between school and home, when appropriate, with young students. In the case of an older student, parents may choose to have the student co-author emails and other collaborative communications. Such acts do more than simply show the student that the parent is checking up on them. This collaboration seen through the eyes of your child will demonstrate a value for their learning and establish a sense of shared expectations.

Finally, take the time to discuss and construct long-term shared academic expectations with your child on a daily basis. Continue to emphasize that post K-12 education - college, trade school, military etc. - is a requirement in your household. Through these conversations, emphasize that in today’s 21st Century global society, every post-secondary pursuit will be built upon K-12 learning. Let your child know, above all else, that you love them and want the best for them in their academic pursuits.