

## Student Achievement Quantified

I recently had a conversation on the phone with a prospective parent. They were considering a move to Platteville and had some questions about our schools. You have heard me in the past talk about the need to draw young families to Platteville if we are going to remain a growing vital community in Southwest Wisconsin. Good schools draw families to the community. Students grow up to be adults that will hopefully stay or return to Southwest Wisconsin to become a part of the workforce that is necessary to drive economic investment in our area.

What should I share with those families to showcase the wonderful opportunities our students have? As the largest district in our region, we offer many curricular and co-curricular options that smaller districts are not always able to provide. We also offer an excellent education. I know that our staff is outstanding, our students are outstanding, and the community support for our schools is second to none.

How can I quantify that in a way for the parent on the phone, so that it doesn't come off as just my opinion? I believe that was what the state was trying to do when they came up with the "School Report Card." The problem is that as with any statistical formula, it is subject to misinformation and anomalies.

The report cards of Platteville School District were recently released and all of our schools received scores of exceeds expectation. Not surprising to us in any way. Our district score dropped from significantly exceeds expectation to exceeds expectation. That seems like a pretty significant change, however, it was mainly due to a drop in just one score, the growth score at Platteville Middle School.

Across the state, the growth score was an area that the Department of Instruction acknowledged large swings that may or may not be representative of an accurate score. Of course, when the report shows improvement, it makes sense to say the score is accurate and when there is a decline, I wouldn't be doing our district justice if I didn't try to find a way to rationalize the decline, because I know how great our staff is and how hard they work.

What conclusions can we draw from this latest round of report cards. The vast majority of our students do extremely well. In fact, only 29 of nearly 400 Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade school districts had a higher overall student achievement score than Platteville. Of those 30 school districts, only one district had a higher percentage of students living in poverty than Platteville. In fact, the average percent of students identified as living in poverty among those 30 districts was 15%. Platteville is at 34%.

What can we improve on? We need to do a better job of improving achievement for those students that come from impoverished families and our students that have disabilities. In other words, "Closing the Gap." We also need to do a better job of making sure all of our students continue to grow in student achievement, from our highest performing students to our lowest performing students.

There is no question that our staff can do it and they are hard at work doing just that. As I complete my article in advance of the Monday deadline, our students are off of school, reading and studying no doubt. Our staff is busy working together on their curriculum, talking about the strengths and growth areas of our students, and developing instructional strategies to help close that gap.