



Principally Speaking

Winter 2007

LETS MAKE NO EXCUSES

In this era of high standards and accountability it's easy to make excuses when students are not achieving at expected levels. For example, the high school may say the middle school is responsible when students arrive in 9th grade not ready for the

rigors of secondary level study. The same excuse can be used at the middle level when students arrive in 6th grade without the foundational skills in reading, writing, and math that should have been learned by 5th grade. Finally, the elementary school may look to the family as an excuse when students arrive in

kindergarten not having had much experience with books or lacking the social or language experiences needed for success. Some people also make the excuse that the standards are just too hard and unfair. Whether any of the excuses are the cause for the lack of student learning or not, does it really matter? Who benefits when we make excuses? My answer: no one, and certainly not our kids. With this in mind, fair or not, I feel we need to embrace the standards movement for its efforts to push us in helping our children become both competent, and competitive in what has become a global community. Because we don't really know the full potential of our children, we can't give up or make excuses when kid don't achieve right away. Instead we need to work harder and smarter. To this end, I feel it is essential that schools develop positive collaborations so that all students succeed at every level in school.

Collaborations at school happen in a variety of ways and include teachers, parents, community members, and students. Here at Heritage, teacher teams work to effectively collaborate and utilize the power of *professional learning communities. We have a long standing mentoring partnership with M&T Bank that in my opinion is one of the best in Western New York. We are in our second year of involvement with Junior Achievement and have established a wonderful partnership with the Audubon library. What about our partnerships or collaborations with parents? I am grateful for our parent volunteer program that includes a number of faithful room parents. Currently, our PTA, made up of a small group of very dedicated parents, is really interested in assuring that our school is a safe, child-centered learning environment. They believe in the importance of family and sponsor numerous activities that bring parents and children together throughout the school year. These PTA parents are involved on various school and district and building teams and work to ensure our students are getting high quality learning experiences. It's true, they support fundraising but their focus by doing this is to use these financial resources to enhance our school's curriculum and student's education experiences. Did you know each year they offset the cost of field trips for students and this spring they will be bringing a children's author to our school during PARP? They also support our PAWS initiative with needed resources so we can reinforce

students for their positive behaviors. Because many hands make light work, I encourage you to get involved with this parents group. I know they are looking for more families to get involved and would welcome your input.

I am proud to say, due to the efforts of many, Heritage Heights is considered “a school in good standing” by the New York State Education Department. Our drive to continue to make gains in the area of literacy and maintain our “good” status is dependent upon the collaborations we have with the families we serve and our community partners. It really does take a community to raise a child and the center of that community is the family. Study after study has shown, and it makes logical sense, that student achievement does go up when there is a safe and orderly learning environment, curriculum that is aligned to the standards we want students to reach, teachers that use effective instructional practices, and most importantly, solid family involvement. We know for certain, a true partnership between school and home establishes both positive relationships as well as motivates students to achieve at high levels. Parents are encouraged to get involved as much as possible in our school and most importantly, their child’s education. We strongly believe when parents help their children come to school each day ready to learn, reading to or with their children daily, keeping in regular contact with their teachers, and working along side other parents, it makes a measurable difference.

Because community and family is important, parents are encouraged to take advantage of two special family nights we have planned during the next two months. First, our annual **Ice Cream Social** with special musical guest, Mark Rust is scheduled for February 9th from 6:30 -8:30 p.m. Second, please mark March 28th on your calendars and plan on joining us for a special **Family Spaghetti Dinner and Literacy Night**. This evening will include performances by our students, book signing by visiting author Toni Buzzeo, conversations with parents, and a special performance by a storyteller. It should be a wonderful family event. If you are coming for dinner, the cost is only \$2.00. More information will be sent home in March.

There’s no need to make excuses if we share the responsibility of helping all kids learn and work collaboratively to do what every it takes to make it happen.

Have a warm winter.

Mr. Wolf

**Professional learning communities (PLC) believe all students can learn and will do what ever it takes to help students achieve at high levels. Working collaboratively with one another, members of PLC’s respond to the questions:*

- *What is it we want students to learn?*
- *How will we know when each student has mastered the essential learning?*
- *How will we respond when a student experiences initial difficulty in learning?*
- *How will we deepen the learning for students who have already mastered the essential knowledge and skills?*