

Failure is NOT an Option

Well, now that the dust has settled from the beginning of the year, we can look back and say “It’s been a great start to the ‘18-’19 school year!” We welcomed our seniors of ’19, our frosh of ’22, and we’re just rollin’. Pretty good. After all, we’re ALHHS. WE GBED, right? Right! Even with all of these changes, we’re still, and expect to continue to be, the same great school we have always been.

As we started the year, we explicitly shared an expectation with our students and families about school that, while understood, seems different from how people look at schools on a daily basis. The expectation? Failure is NOT an Option!

Schools are about learning – not teaching. And, although educators in the ALCSO are working and learning about how to GBED to help students learn – EACH STUDENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR LEARNING.

You didn’t come here to fail, and ALHS will not accept any student choosing to NOT give us acceptable evidence of learning. Period. I’m not kidding.

We have repurposed our Tutoring and In-School Assignment program to create the H.A.R.B.O.R. (Helping All Realize Better Overall Results) to provide students struggling to achieve of focus with an environment dedicated to success. No class changes, no social distractions, just quiet learning space and support - until grades are up to par.

At the mid-point of quarter 1, students need to be sure Powerschool reflects success. If you can’t do it without support - we’ll help.

Parents expect success, and we will reach out to families, as necessary, to provide the support and assistance needed. We are fortunate to have great parent and family “teammates” at ALHS.

Our teacher’s responsibility for teaching and instruction can be summarized with 5 words related to learning – Designing, Directing, Assessing, Responding, and Reporting. For many students, the Reporting – as in assigning a grade – is seen as most important. Here is where many problems and misunderstandings about expectations exist. Again, school is about learning, not necessarily about grades.

Students want grades – GPA’s. The expectation is, “OK give it to me, let me give it back on the test, score it, and let’s move on.” Assignments? How many points are they worth? Our world becomes a race for “points” in an environment where the points – and the grade – are more important than the intended learning. Our teachers have known this forever. Somehow, “work” (which is good) gets reported as learning, and vice-versa, and we all get caught in “total points prison.”

Work is good. Everybody respects a good work ethic, and our experience tells us that the harder one works, the better one gets. Terrific!

Work, however, is not necessarily learning. Learning is acquiring, applying and demonstrating an understanding of material, information and concepts - knowledge.

To determine the level of student learning, teachers administer assessments, formative (quizzes/HW/classwork) and summative (tests/exams/reports, etc.). Formatives are like interims, they tell where a student is “on the way” to learning. It is really OK to make mistakes along the way. Some need more “practice” than others. Summatives evaluate student learning “at a point in time,” like the unit, quarter, semester, and so on, and make up the basis for the grade reported.

It is critically important to students, families and our schools that grades accurately report learning. In order to best insure that a school’s grades really reflect learning, colleges and universities require applicants to provide results of an entrance exam, the SAT or, like most Ohio schools, the ACT. As you know, a student’s SAT/ACT scores play a large role in determining whether or not they are accepted to a particular school.

The ACT/SAT compare student scores to scores from students across the country, in order to determine an applicant's qualifications. With GPA, strength of program and service/participation record, these scores help tell every applicant's story.

PSAT Test Day is Wednesday, October 10th. I hope this column helps motivate all students to do their very best. The results from these exams will give families important information about how to improve for the SAT and ACT, and help our teachers plan for student learning.

We've had a great start. Our teams and groups are having a wonderful fall. We've completed Spirit and Homecoming, and, life at ALHS is good. Socially – and, more importantly – Academically – we want it to be good for you! Have a great year! GBED!

Peace,
Joseph J. Mueller Principal Avon Lake High School