

Hazen Shares Plan To Shape Future Together

To the editor:

Most schools today were designed for an earlier era. In order to shape a hopeful and prosperous future for our town, we must provide all young people in the Hazen community with the knowledge, skills and habits they need to meet the demands of and thrive in a complex global society. The best way to ensure our Hazen community keeps up with the changing world is to take a common-sense approach to "remodeling" our school system. Preparing students for specific jobs by teaching them specific facts is less effective than using education to create independent citizens who are able to make educated decisions when new opportunities arise for themselves and their communities.

Students must be exposed to modern technological and societal innovations occurring worldwide so they can apply their new knowledge to our local community here in Vermont. Teachers must master the most effective and efficient learning strategies available to us

in the 21st century. The community must engage with our young people in new ways, by sponsoring internships or job shadows, offering expertise, or simply connecting with the next generation of leaders and contributors by saying hello or asking them a question.

Thankfully, we are not starting from scratch; there is much to appreciate and celebrate about our schools. And we have already begun remodeling our education system, much as one would remodel a house. We are updating older parts, such as installing new insulation and modern electrical wiring, while preserving what remains strong and useful. We know more than ever about how students learn. It's time to integrate new knowledge of how the brain learns into our schools and communities.

Vermont is in the forefront of change by supporting several high-impact strategies including the new Flexible Pathways legislation, known as Act 77. Act 77 is dedicated to providing all students in Vermont with high quality

educational experiences that put students at the center of their own education. Hazen is working hard to bring our local education system "up to code." Over the next few months, the Hazen Communication Team will submit monthly letters to the editor to share various stories and perspectives on how we are planning to help all students discover their passions, set their goals, and learn how they can help strengthen our local and global communities in the years ahead. Stay tuned!

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Letters From Readers

Learning Needs Relevance, Rigor, Relationship, And Shared Responsibility

To the editor:

Welcome back to the Hazen Communication Team's series on Act 77! Act 77, Flexible Pathways, is necessary for the future of our community and how remodeling our education system will have a positive impact on educators, students, parents and citizens.

It's safe to say new ideas and technology have changed the world and our communities. As a result, the skills and thinking required of our students to be successful, engaged citizens within their communities have changed. It is incumbent upon teachers and school leaders to find and implement the best practices available to meet these new demands. Fortunately, the science community has some answers in how we can most effectively and efficiently achieve this goal.

Neurologists have made incredible advancements in understanding how the brain learns. We now know the mental foundations for any educational endeavor are grounded in what we call the "4 R's." Simply put, our brains learn best when the learning experience is relevant to their interests and passions, challenging and rigorous, grounded in a positive relationship with teachers and staff, and when the learner shares responsibility for constructing and implementing their learning. Theory is all well and good, but how will this look in the classroom? Act 77 requires that each student in Vermont, in partnership with a teacher or advisor, create and implement a Personalized Learning Plan (PLP) by the end of 2017.

The mental foundations for suc-

cessful learning — relevance, rigor, relationship, and shared responsibility — are embodied in a Personalized Learning Plan. Student goals and interests guide the relevance of their learning, and teachers ensure that rigorous standards are embedded within the plan. A Personalized Learning Plan encourages students to build relationships with the greater community through internships and place based learning. In sharing the responsibility of co-constructing, implementing, and demonstrating completion of their plans, students take greater responsibility for their learning than the traditional classroom allows.

A Personalized Learning Plan is designed to ensure that you do not fall through the cracks. Proficiency in the fundamentals will still be required — English, history, math, and science. But you will also be required to learn the skills embedded in these classes, through the strategies of the 4R's. Passivity is not an option. A Personalized Learning Plan will engage students in the action of learning.

Being a historian and teacher, I firmly understand the importance of connecting with our shared history and its impact on our future. I am always searching for methods to improve this process. Personalized Learning Plans encourage students to become lifelong learners and to master myriad skills to ensure they have what it takes to build a bright future for our community and beyond.

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Letters From Readers

Flexible Education Works For Students

To the editor:

As the world is evolving rapidly, we believe our school system must move forward as well, so young people like ourselves are prepared to thrive as workers and citizens in our community. We live in a global and interconnected society that demands a lot more of us than was expected of previous generations. To achieve this end, students should personalize their own learning to fit their needs and goals.

We believe this can be achieved by building a system that supports the new legislation, Act 77: Flexible Pathways. This is aimed at ensuring the success of individuals in order to build greater collective communities. This allows students to make choices involving the nature of their own education. Because they have personalized their education in order to align with their aspirations, these students will not only be more engaged but more

prepared to make useful contributions that benefit everyone.

As students, we watch some of our capable and focused peers struggle in traditional classroom settings. Everyone learns differently, and it is critical that our system is a habitat where students are free to learn about what interests them and the skills that will prove most useful, while working to meet accepted and rigorous school-wide ends.

Some students show great direction toward a chosen path early in life. By using the opportunities the Green Mountain Technical and Career Center program offers, these individuals are able to start serving their communities sooner and with more experience in the field. High schoolers who would like to attend courses offered both by their school and by local colleges, can become dually enrolled and take advantage of all the available knowledge being taught — and at

no extra cost!

We as youth experts, conducted research on students from many different academic backgrounds and their opinions on learning. We found they valued qualities that would be emphasized by the implementation of Flexible Pathways.

On a personal note, I, Dylan, see a tremendous opportunity here for students to pilot their own learning. However, students need a vessel to do so; Flexible Pathways is the way. I have experienced first hand the benefits of personalizing my learning; more students need to realize the paths they can explore. We have some great programs in place already at Hazen. The work ahead is strengthening them and bringing awareness to students of the possibilities at their fingertips.

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