

## Nov. 15-21 is National Education Week

Written by Supt. Bret Miles, Holyoke School Dist. Re-1J

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If you have not noticed it on your calendar, Nov. 15-21 is recognized as National Education Week.

I thought this would be a good time to reflect on a survey that is put together by Phi Delta Kappa International and Gallop polls. For the past 41 years the two groups have teamed up to provide the country with data on the public's perception about public education in our country. Here are some highlights of the report.

The first question asked on the survey since 1969 has been, "What do you think are the biggest problems that the public schools of your community must deal with?" For the 10th year in a row, the top answer is lack of funding. In the 2008 survey, lack of funding accounted for 17 percent of the answers. In this year's survey, it accounted for 32 percent. Currently I am conducting individual interviews with all of the employees in the Holyoke School District and have also found this to be the top response when I asked employees to tell me what they see as the key issues facing the school district.

Those of you who follow state level news know that in the coming months there will be plenty of time spent talking about school finance and the challenges for our upcoming budget year, so we will leave it at that for now.

Every year when this survey comes out, I immediately jump to the questions where people are asked to give letter grades to the schools. First, respondents are asked to give a letter grade (A-F) to the school their oldest child attends. In 2009, 74 percent of the respondents gave the school where their oldest child attends the grade of an A or B.

Then the poll asks the same question of the schools across the nation, and this time only 19 percent give a grade of an A or B. I love this question because it just doesn't stand to reason that most people can see their own school as doing well, but the schools they have never been to as doing poorly.

It is a great reminder to educators everywhere to get people into our schools. There is good work going on all the time, but we don't always get people in the doors to see it. Please

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consider this an open invitation to visit our schools here in Holyoke.

Another interesting finding is that a majority of Americans feel that education is not as good today as it was when they were in school. But when you ask this question of parents only, most parents believe that education today is better than when they were in school.

Again this is another example of the perception of schools improving the closer you are to the school. I would challenge you to find out what a first grader in our school district is expected to do in reading and math by the end of the year and compare that to what we were expected to do at the end of our first grade year.

Or on the other end of the spectrum, look at how many students are taking advanced placement math and science courses and compare that to how many students were ready for that level of content when we were in school. There is no question that the bar continues to be raised.

I hope you will join me in taking time this week to think about the accomplishments of our schools and the teachers and other staff who make it possible. The report clearly demonstrates year in and year out that the more you know about the school, the more you like. My guess is that this is true for most people in our community as well. I am proud of the work that goes on in our schools every day and am pleased to have my children here. Happy National Education Week to educators everywhere.