



**The Ridgewood News
Superintendent's Corner
February 2020
by
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The following column appeared in The Ridgewood News February 28, 2020.

Vision 2024: Meeting Needs of Today's Learner and Tomorrow's Workplace

How can we best prepare our students for success in the workplace? As an educator and the leader of the district, this is a question that must be carefully considered and revisited often to ensure that we are meeting the needs of today's learners in preparation for both the current workplace and the one of the future. While a rigorous and current academic program is the core of our Tradition of Excellence, this was also one of the guiding questions contemplated during the development of the Vision 2024 Strategic Plan. Skills that were previously identified as "soft" skills have recently taken the forefront of must-have qualities sought by employers. Similarly, our Strategic Planning Council and Steering Committee identified creativity, critical thinking, empathy, and resilience as essential competencies; these became known as the "Habits of Learning" that feed into the ultimate goal of Vision 2024--lifelong learning.

Last spring, we embarked on the strategic planning process with facilitators from TMI Education, a diverse group of stakeholders from the community, and a steering committee within the district. Following an initial information session, the council members engaged in three sessions, where they delved deep into our current practices in the areas of teaching, culture, community, and governance to establish the broad district goals. Three essential questions were at the core of this group's work to help shape the next five years of the district. The council was asked to consider the trends that will shape our students' future, the skills needed to succeed, and ways to provide an educational experience that meets those needs.

In a 2019 Forbes article by Bernard Marr titled "The 10 Vital Skills You Will Need for the Future of Work," only one subject-specific skill was mentioned – technology skills, and that came in at number nine. Some skills that stood out to me include diversity and cultural intelligence, growth mindset, and critical thinking. At the top of this list was creativity. Coincidentally, these are some of the vital foundational skills that our teachers and administrators have been working to advance in the district. Educators recognize the importance of building these skills in students to prepare them for success in all other areas. This is evident when I walk into any school building. Students are moving around the classroom, using spaces in a more flexible way, which encourages discussion and group activities. Creativity and exploration are taking place every day.

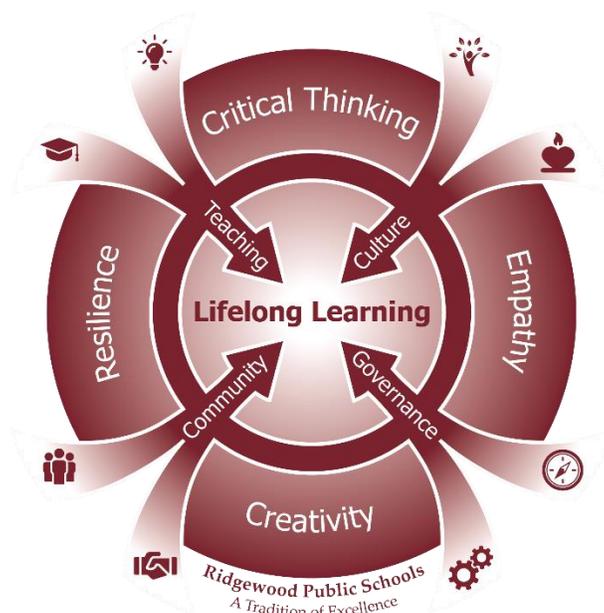


Interdisciplinary lessons and programs are offered throughout the curriculum, helping students to see the relationship between subject areas and make connections. Our makerspaces are being used regularly at all levels and in all disciplines to bring project designs to life. After-school clubs are also utilizing these facilities where students apply STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics) to solve real-world problems in our community. The Applied Engineering Club at the high school is one such example. Students tackled complex problems and designed innovative projects such as a solar portable water sanitizer, an angled bike cargo rack, and an arborist drone tree cutter. All seven projects designed by the club's invent teams were accepted into the STEAM Tank Challenge North Jersey Regional Competition on March 14 at Liberty Science Center, which speaks to their level of creativity and innovation. These skills are being fostered beginning in elementary school. Recently, first-grade students made guitars to further explore sound and vibration during a science lesson. Making something is such a creative way to apply knowledge and is the essence of demonstrating learning!

Through inquiry-based learning opportunities, students are challenged to examine problems, work collaboratively, and think critically and creatively to find a solution. This type of learning puts the student in the driver's seat. Unlike traditional teacher-driven methods, students are questioning, sharing ideas, trying, and failing as a means of figuring out what works and what doesn't. This type of learning also builds resilience and teaches students that success often results from failure. Furthermore, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) has been an area of focus, holding one of three spots in our district professional development goals for the past two years. Teachers are bringing their professional development experiences back to the classroom by engaging students in activities that promote understanding and build empathy. This vital skill not only serves to create a positive and welcoming school culture, but it will also benefit the students through adulthood, building their capacity to be compassionate and community-minded.

As we move forward with Vision 2024, teachers and administrators are evaluating where we are meeting the goals set forth and how we can continue to improve our instructional methods and content knowledge. We are collaborating with Great Schools Partnership to guide a comprehensive professional development program, as we explore proficiency-based learning and build consensus toward common shared outcomes for all students. What I have learned as an educational leader is that change is constant and necessary in all areas of life. By learning about the workplace of tomorrow, we can fine-tune our teaching to offer the best educational experience for our students and prepare them for all that the future holds.

The Vision 2024 graphic represents the many components of a Ridgewood Public Schools education, which contributes to the goal of lifelong learning. To learn more about the strategic plan, visit the district website at www.ridgewood.k12.nj.us to view presentations made at Board of Education meetings.



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