

Plainville Citizen Op-Ed, December, 2020

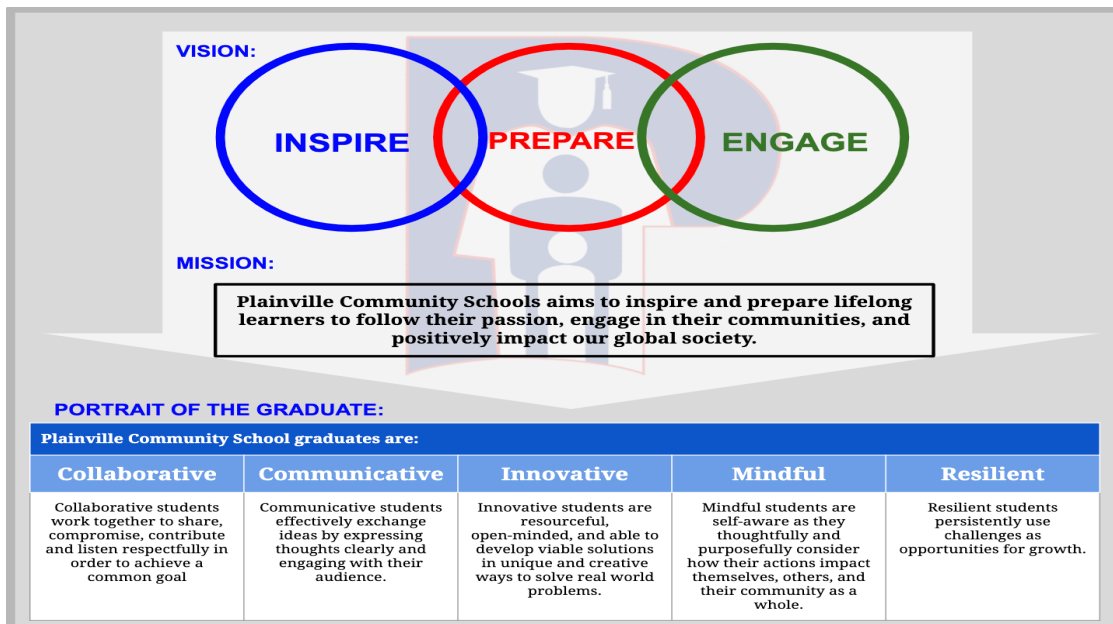
What are the skills that matter most and contribute to the greatest likelihood of our students' future success? School districts everywhere strive to answer this question, hoping to provide the right balance of coursework, preparation and relevant learning experiences. The goal is to support well-rounded and relevant skill development, setting students up for future success. Now, more than ever, students leaving high school and entering college, trade programs, the military or the world of work, must have a comprehensive and balanced set of skills to increase their odds of success.

So what skills are most important? Skills within S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math), or humanities (English, language arts and social studies)? Perhaps those from the visual and performing arts are most essential? Ultimately, school districts have a limited time during which to teach an incredible amount of information, content and skills to students from pre-kindergarten through high school graduation. The most important skills are somewhat subjective given that the specific skills our students will need vary depending on their individual chosen field of pursuit. While all students require the development of skills and knowledge across a balanced and thoughtful school program, not all students want to be engineers with advanced mathematical and technical knowledge. Not all students want to be writers, journalists or poets capable of high-level written compositions. Not everyone is an artist or a musician; those require refined skills that derive from a passion in those areas. In short, we typically become good at the skills that we enjoy the most and those which we find the most benefit from. In Plainville Community Schools, we strive to provide programs that produce a balance across all areas, but also enable specialization and development of unique skills and abilities in preparation for post-graduation success.

So again we can ask ...what skills matter most? In an attempt to answer this and plan for the development of such skills in all of our students, we formed a committee of administrators and

teachers district-wide who analyzed this very question. They also sought input from families, students and colleagues across the school district. The outcome of this committee’s work is what we now refer to as the **“Plainville Community Schools Portrait of the Graduate”** - a framework that includes a set of five core competencies and skills that we as a school district believe support and reinforce our vision: ***To inspire and prepare lifelong learners to follow their passion, engage in their communities, and positively impact our global society.*** These core competencies are not academic skills, rather they are often referred to as “soft skills” - those primary traits that are relevant to overall success in life. Ironically, these soft skills are often the hardest to master.

Whether entering the workforce, a branch of the military, pursuing post-secondary training or a college education, there are skills that transcend all life and career goals. Plainville’s Portrait of the Graduate framework highlights the importance of five core qualities and skills that support these goals including: *Collaboration, Communication, Innovation, Mindfulness and Resiliency.* We define these skills and their connection to our vision and mission within the following visual:



Our goal as a school district is to teach and reinforce these core skills at all levels, beginning with our youngest learners and continuing through to our high school graduates. These skills are critical to success in all areas of life; however; it is important to note that we do not expect every student to master each of these skills. We each have our own individual strengths and qualities that make us unique. Yet, it is important for us to work to develop each area, with perhaps some personal areas of specialty. For example, an introvert may prefer to work independently rather than collaborate, but they may be very resilient, mindful and innovative individuals, and work toward becoming more collaborative. Someone who loves to work with others and is a very effective communicator, may perhaps be slightly less innovative, given their ability to communicate and collaborate on ideas with others, and may work toward strengthening their innovative and creative competencies. We are each unique; however; we want all students to develop at least a level of proficiency in each of these five primary areas. Teaching, developing and supporting these traits will continue to be an ongoing area of focus across Plainville Community Schools.

To support the district's focus on the Portrait of the Graduate model, we recently launched the "*Portrait Pioneer Award*" program whereby a colleague, student, parent or community member can nominate a member of our school district staff who best models and embodies some or all of the Portrait of the Graduate core qualities. The nomination form is available on the school district website home page under the "Portrait Pioneer" icon. We have already received several nominations in just a few days, and will begin recognizing the Portrait Pioneer honorees at our Plainville Board of Education meetings beginning in January. If you wish to nominate a school district member who exemplifies these qualities, please submit a nomination. Any member of our district staff is eligible for this special recognition.