

Observations from a Laconia headmaster in 1948 are still true today

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In 1948, Laconia High School Headmaster Donald F. Piper, for whom the LHS Auditorium is named, wrote about “superior teachers” at Laconia High School. In a report entitled “Good Teachers! The Laconia High School Faculty,” Piper expressed the importance of securing “quality teachers” and the skills and dispositions that they “must have.” Though he wrote this piece over 70 years ago, his statement about “superior teaching” is what we continue to strive to do in the Laconia School District today.

When Piper stated that superior teachers are “not only skillful in presenting subject-matter, but also in stimulating the pupil’s interest in the subject,” he was talking about personalization. Today, we are trying to personalize education for our students by providing them “voice and choice” in their learning experiences. We continue to develop performance assessments that require students to solve problems, communicate, collaborate, and create in authentic and relevant scenarios and settings. Knowing each student helps us use their interests as pathways to their learning. If students truly own what they are doing in the classroom, engagement increases. Piper also stated that the superior teacher “sees in each pupil an individual person with particular abilities and characteristics.” Clearly, he understood that each student is unique. Personalization is a way that we can meet each student where they are at.

When Piper stated that the superior teacher “takes a constructive interest in all the school is trying to accomplish,” he understood the importance of the staff working together to meet the needs of children. In one recent study, collective teacher efficacy was a factor that had one of the greatest effects on student achievement. In other words, when the school staff works together, the quality of teaching and learning

improves. This year, our staff in the Laconia School District is working to meet two primary goals: 1) Develop a Portrait of a Graduate that includes four to six skills that ground the Pre-K-to-12 academic program, and 2) Continue to improve the quality of instruction in our schools. We realize that working together will yield greater results.

When Piper stated that the superior teacher “engages in continuous professional study and has an interest in education that reaches beyond...the classroom,” he was talking about the importance of professional development. Professional development for teachers continues to be a priority for the Laconia School District. Educators engage in professional learning in teams and work with experts in the district and off-site. At this time, our professional development is focused on writing quality performance assessments, developing curriculum, understanding the diverse needs of our learners, and providing quality instruction for students.

When Piper stated that the superior teacher “assumes a responsibility in the matter of public relationships (and) seeks to become acquainted with parents and patrons,” he understood the importance of positive relationships in our work. When we can connect with a child and work with parents, the quality of teaching and learning is enhanced. Piper wrote about relationships from a teacher’s point of view, but our community’s relationship with our teachers is a critical component of our educational system. Our community has a long history of supporting educators in our schools.

Piper’s words remind us that good teaching is good teaching, and that remains important to our staff. Our schools have changed since 1948. The rate of change in education and the world around us is greater now than in any other time in world history. The era of the one-room schoolhouse ended long ago. We are now educating children in an interconnected, digital, automated, and globalized world. The online platforms and digital tools to communicate and access information has transformed the 21st century classroom. We also have learning taking place online, in the workplace, and in the community. The level of services and supports that schools are providing children has increased. In 1948, receiving an 8th grade education was good enough to prepare students for work in an industrial, factory-based economy. We are now preparing students for careers in a high tech, global economy. However, LHS Headmaster Piper reminds us of the importance of good teaching in schools. That focus should not change.

