

DISTRICT 202 COMMUNITY COLUMN

By Dr. Lane Abrell
Superintendent of Schools
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Dear District 202 Community,

It is hard to believe, but this will be my last Thanksgiving as a full-time professional educator.

After 36 years in the business of trying to help children learn, grow, achieve, and succeed in and out of the classroom, including 18 years in District 202, I am retiring this coming June.

I am very confident that my successor, Dr. Glenn Wood, our current associate superintendent, will far exceed any of my accomplishments and lead District 202 to even greater accomplishments.

However, even as I look forward to retirement, I cannot help but to look back at what has been the most rewarding and fulfilling career I think I could have chosen.

I began my education career in 1986 as a high school teacher and progressed to become a dean before arriving in District 202 in 1997 as high school assistant principal. Being a high school assistant principal in a rapidly growing district laid the groundwork to become principal at Plainfield High School (now, Central) from 1999-2006.

I left the principalship in District 202 to accept the superintendent position with Leland Community Unit School District 1 from 2006-2014. This was a difficult but needed step in my professional career.

In Leland, a small, rural school district, I was involved with every district-level leadership aspect from school finance, curriculum, human resources, transportation, and facilities. Without a doubt, my seven years as Superintendent in Leland was the best preparation for returning to District 202 as its 19th superintendent.

As I write this and look back over my career, I am amazed at how many things changed over that time: my roles and responsibilities, the socioeconomics and demographics of the communities I worked in, and most especially, the size of the districts and the different challenges relative to their size.

I first came to District 202 at the start of the explosive growth that turned what was once a small community into the fourth-largest district in Illinois, and then returned as that growth and the Great Recession were ending.

Then of course there were the many shifts in the “political sands” of public education, in terms of the myriad list of things educators must now do on top of their “regular job” of teaching children academics.

From the very welcome and important focus on social-emotional learning, to the necessary but sad role of teaching children how to respond to intruders, to struggling to support students during the current pandemic, it is mind-boggling all the things for which schools are now responsible.

Yet, as the saying goes, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

For example, no matter how fast the world seems to move, children still need caring, dedicated adults – whether parents or teachers or both working together -- to patiently spend time with them and slow things down until that precious, magical moment when a new fact or lesson or idea “clicks.”

For me, education will always be a “people” business. If nothing else, this current pandemic has reaffirmed my belief that “machines” (computers and other technology) will never totally replace in-person education.

With that in mind, I am sincerely thankful for the many thousands of professional educators, parents and guardians and Board of Education members everywhere I have been blessed to work who have helped shape the lives of countless thousands of students.

I am confident that despite the many challenges we face in and out of our schools, our children will survive and thrive because of their commitment and hard work.

For the last November of my career as District 202 superintendent of schools I wish everyone a very happy, healthy, and safe Thanksgiving and holiday season. Together, we will continue to prepare learners for the future.

Dr. Lane Abrell
Superintendent