

New Beginnings

As we mark the end of 2020 and start 2021, many of us are preparing to return to our office, cubicle, warehouse, school, college, or other places of work. Whether you are faced with a new office project, or even a job, you should be excited about the adventure that is about to begin. To move forward in any new direction means you will be growing personally and professionally.

What I know for sure is that 2020 presented us with unprecedented challenges. In Halifax County Schools, we learned to pivot with the waves of uncertainty and learned to ride them instead of fight them. I love to look back on our past to learn lessons to help us solve problems today. The Great Depression was the worst economic disaster in modern history. Many of our grandparents were children during this time. My grandmother would always tell us “Don’t waste, use it up and make due.” This Depression-era motto helped many families’ live life as close to normal as possible while adapting to the new normal. Many families embraced a life of frugality and this approach still resonates today.

COVID-19 has taken its toll on every aspect of life. We are seeing high unemployment, business and school closures just to name a few. In Halifax County Schools, we have certainly evolved and tried to “make due” and eliminate wasteful practices that increase inefficiencies and costs. Here are some examples of cost cutting efforts in our county.

Our maintenance director has increased efforts to lower utility costs. We have installed controls switches on HVAC equipment, and encouraged employees to turn off lights, computers and other equipment when not in use. By focusing on changing behaviors, our district saved \$21,000 in one month alone.

In our finance department, insurance policies were reviewed to see if they were needed. Obsolete policies were quickly non renewed. One person was assigned as the main contact in our purchasing department and accuracy has increased. For example, we purchased a new math curriculum when enrollment was much higher. When the shipment arrived at the beginning of the year, our enrollment decreased which meant we didn’t need as much. By streaming the process, we were able to save an additional \$17,000. Our help desk program has repaired over 100 computers so far. If you remember we charged every parent who wanted a device \$40 for accidental damage protection. When we sent the device to the manufacturer for repair, they wanted to bill HCS \$272 to repair the device because it was accidental. This cost would have been given to the parent. Imagine the impact during our worst economic time!

In HCS, we have embraced some old school practices like growing our own farm which is GAP certified. Being GAP certified allows us to sell our food to other school districts and at the farmer’s markets. Our students are paid \$8.00 per hour and are learning the value of hard work.

As superintendent of Halifax County Schools, I move into 2021 knowing that I am better than I was this time last year. I am overwhelmed with deep gratitude for lessons learned and for the HCS team who linked arms with me to walk through darkness and uncertainty. With the recent dramatic change in pace, we continue to remain positive and focus on how we will continue to improve. Every day may not be a good day but there is good in every day. Halifax County Schools will continue to chart a new course to a brighter future.