

Finding Our Flow

Flow has been described as a heightened state of being, where we are so absorbed in a task that concerns like time, food, and self-consciousness disappear. You can probably recall times you had experienced flow yourself—when you were "in the zone" on a sports field or deeply engaged in a work project, and the hours flew by like minutes. I most certainly do during my college days of playing basketball. I remember times when I was so hot that I could not miss a shot; it was like the game slowed down. Researchers have said when this happens; you are in the zone. Zone means anything can be accomplished.

In basketball, there is always a new duty that needs attention, so one cannot concentrate on a missed shot or a careless pass. I learned if I focused on the mistake, I was more likely to repeat it on the other end of the floor as well. So you have to learn to let it go. When you are in the 'zone' you are engrossed in the game's flow. You don't notice crowd commotion, coach yelling from the bench, or even the whistle. Players play on instinct, habit, and automatic actions since there is no distinction between their body and mind while engaged in the activity. Going into year seven, as the proud Superintendent of Halifax County Schools, we will focus on flow.

Halifax County Schools will focus on flow by setting clear goals, project-based learning, and building positive relationships. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a Psychologist, has found that a fundamental condition for flow is that an activity should have clear goals which provide structure and direction. This is true in the classroom, mainly when students help define their goals. As students progress toward these goals, research suggests it is essential for them to receive ongoing feedback along the way. This does not imply that teachers must intervene in a student's process, but it indicates that students must be aware of how their efforts progress toward the desired outcome. By receiving this kind of feedback, students can adjust their actions in a way that helps them stay in the flow and increase overall student achievement.

In Halifax County Schools, we are gearing more towards project-based learning, a form of instruction whereby students actively participate in relevant, real-world projects to learn. We want students to find "flow," that feeling of complete immersion in an activity where they are so engaged that their worries, sense of time, and self-consciousness seem to disappear. Mihaly and others found that flow deepens learning and encourages long-term interest in a subject. Flow research, like other educational research, has shown that hands-on activities often get kids more engaged in their learning than passive activities. Making things, solving problems, and creating artwork tend to induce more flow than lectures or videos, as long as the materials needed to complete and the assignments are readily available. The research concludes that teachers can encourage more flow in their classrooms through lessons that offer choices.

Lastly, we will continue to build positive relationships with students and all stakeholders. Education researcher David Shernoff of Northern Illinois University says positive relationships between peers, teachers, and students boost flow. The development of these connections can occasionally take longer time, but subtle strategies can go a long way. In Halifax County Schools, we are committed to exploring ways to engage our scholars to increase student achievement. I challenge you all to get in the zone and find your flow.