



# Peru Elementary School District 124

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August 20, 2014

Dear Parents,

Today is the first day of the 2014-15 school year, and I wanted to take the opportunity to share some personal thoughts regarding the current state of education at the national, state and, most importantly, local levels. I am very fortunate to serve as the superintendent of this great district, and we are all very proud of the incredible progress we have made in recent years, building on previous years of excellence. At the end of the day, our kids and their safety and educational growth are all that matters to us. We work hard to keep anything from distracting us from these priorities.

Unfortunately, there are many federal and state education initiatives that can very much be a distraction from what matters most. These initiatives are based on good intentions and are cloaked in the concept of accountability, but unfortunately most do little to actually improve teaching and learning. Most are designed to assess, measure, rank and otherwise place some largely meaningless number on a child or a school or a teacher or a district. That is not to say that student growth data is not important. It is very critical, and it is exactly why we have our own local assessment system in place. It is what our principals and teachers use to help guide instruction and meet the needs of your kids on a daily basis. In other words, it is meaningful data to help us teach your child.

But no more than a number from a bathroom scale can give you a full assessment of your personal wellness, a test score cannot fully assess a student's academic growth. Does stepping on the scale tell you something? Of course. But does it tell you everything? Absolutely not!

As one specific example, Peru Elementary District 124 puts great value on the fine arts. We believe that music and art enhances cognitive growth, creativity and problem solving. In fact, we know this, and this is exactly why your children have access to an outstanding fine arts program with five music and art teachers from PreK through 8th grade. The state does not assess music or art, or science or social studies for that matter. Only language arts and mathematics are assessed with the state's new Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment.

This is why I wanted to let you know that we will not be talking to you that much about the PARCC assessment or Common Core or other initiatives that have some importance, but they are not what matters most to us. YOUR CHILDREN are what matter most, and we believe that kids should be well-rounded, with an emphasis on a solid foundation for learning across all subjects by the time they get to high school and later college. We believe that kids need to be creative and learn to solve problems. We believe that exposure to music and art, science and social studies, physical education and technology and a wide variety of curricular and extracurricular activities will serve them very well as they grow into young adults.

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We further believe that there is no replacement for high expectations, and we must expect our students to achieve to the best of their individual ability. We believe that all children can learn, but not all at the same pace or in the same way. We believe that reading and literacy are the foundations of learning. We believe that children are each unique and have a wide variety of talents and skills, very few of which can be measured on a state assessment.

The state and federal government have failed epically in their misguided attempts at "reforming" public education. Public education does not need reformed. It may need intervention in school districts that are not meeting the needs of students on a grand scale, but it needs to be accountable to and controlled by our citizens at the local level. And in Peru Schools, this will continue to be very much the case.

So, I wanted to let you know that we will not let these other things serve as a distraction from educating your children in Peru Schools. When appropriate, we will use these opportunities as a chance to improve but we will not let political nonsense distract us from our true mission, which is to keep your kids safe and to provide them with a world class education. One of my favorite quotes is, "Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least." And the "things" which matter most here are your kids and their education. Nothing you read or hear about will distract us from that effort.

Thank you for your support of our children and our schools and as always, please let me know if you have any questions or concerns at all as we start the new school year!

Sincerely,

*Mark R. Cross*

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Superintendent