

Letters to the Editor

Letter to the Editor:

My Christmas Wish

In 1954, there were many physiologists who believed it would be impossible for a human to ever run a mile in less than 4 minutes. It was believed that it would be harmful to the human body to even attempt such a feat. However, on a windy day in May 1954, Roger Bannister became the first human to run a sub-four minute mile. There are many individuals in our nation who do not believe that the achievement gap can be closed. For many different reasons such as lack of resources, lack of support, and lack of ability, these individuals do not believe it is possible to close the achievement gap. My Christmas wish is that as a community, Iredell County teachers, parents, students, and community members all believe that the achievement gap can be closed.

The Iredell-Statesville School system has focused a great deal of effort this year in developing this common belief that the gap can be closed. Why? The answer relates directly to the Roger Bannister story.

1. What we believe has a profound effect on what we achieve. Mr. Bannister believed that a human could run a sub-four minute mile. Even though all individuals do not believe the achievement gap can be closed, there are many who believe it can be done.

2. Changing the way we and others think in order to increase performance is an important leadership opportunity and responsibility.

Once Roger Bannister broke the four minute barrier, others were quick to follow. Within three years after Bannister broke the barrier, sixteen other people had followed his lead. Once school systems begin to close the gap, many more will follow. Why should Iredell-Statesville Schools not be among the first?

3. Achieving the impossible cannot be done without careful planning and focused energy. When asked to explain how he had broken the barrier, Bannister said, "It's the ability to take more out of yourself than you've got." This is what must be done in Iredell County. It will take time to plan and select the correct strategies to close the gap. It will take hard work and commitment from teachers, students, parents, and the community to implement focused energy.

Recently, I read an article that described the beliefs that have led a number of school systems in the Minority Student Achievement Network to success in closing the gap. As part of my Christmas wish I hope that everyone will adopt these beliefs. As part of my New Year's resolution, I plan on practicing these beliefs.

1. Achievement is not innately determined, children will achieve when they are effectively taught HOW to learn. Recent studies have shown that the quality of teacher that a student has can account for as much as 70% of the difference in student achievement.

2. Every child has unique strengths: our responsibility as parents and

educators is to discover and build upon these strengths.

3. Schools and teachers that concentrate on how learning processes affect students will be more productive than those that blame students, families, or poverty for underachievement of students.

4. Each staff member must examine his/her beliefs and change practices to counteract racism and discrimination.

5. Schools will be considered excellent only when students of all racial, ethnic, and disability groups are achieving at high levels.

The Iredell-Statesville Schools Board of Education recently heard the final plan from the Closing the Achievement Gap Task Force. The plan presented represented many

of the beliefs voiced above. The Board of Education is committed to closing the gap and reaching the mission of the schools. My Christmas wish is that everyone will join us and support us in this effort. Have

a Happy Holiday season!

Dr. Terry Holliday
Superintendent
Iredell-Statesville Schools

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