

## Superintendent Geoff Andrews speaks!

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This is the first in a series of interviews with the SITES community (published in "Learn More... / Interviews".)  
 - SITES as Co-conspirator in the Oberlin Public School Renaissance & "The volunteers need to understand the value that they're bringing to the children of Oberlin. It is important that we find a way that these volunteers understand that they, too, are co-conspirators [in the Oberlin Public School Renaissance.]"

These are words from Geoff Andrews, the new superintendent of the Oberlin Public Schools and a primary figure behind the rapid growth of the SITES program.

- Two Compelling Reasons Superintendent Andrews notes that there are two reasons why providing Spanish instruction is important for Oberlin youth. One you may have already guessed- "It's just the right time" to learn a foreign language, a task which becomes increasingly difficult as we get older. However, Mr. Andrews also notes another reason why SITES is important: "Learning a foreign language at a young age helps you to handle abstraction in a better way. It makes you a better writer, a better reader, a better mathematics student...it has even been shown to help standardized test scores."

- Literacy Is The Ticket

When asked about his hopes for the S.I.T.E.S program, Mr. Andrews pauses and acknowledges that using college students as language teachers is a solution borne out of opportunity. There is a significant need for schools to be as nimble and responsive as they can be, because as he noted, "If you were designing schools today to solve the kinds of problems that schools are being asked to solve today, we would not design the schools we have today." But being a new superintendent is very much about redesigning schools using all resources available, and Mr. Andrews saw the S.I.T.E.S program as a fast way to improve student achievement. He notes that a substantial number of Oberlin 3rd graders are not reading at grade level, and that literacy is a major issue facing the district. "Every test is a reading test. Take a word problem: 'Johnny walked 3 blocks...' If you can't read the problem correctly you can't even get to the math...Literacy is the ticket, and foreign language helps literacy."

- Teacher Hesitance towards S.I.T.E.S

When asked about his fears regarding the S.I.T.E.S program, the superintendent notes that teachers are naturally protective of class time. Therefore some teachers may be reticent to give up class time for Spanish lessons. "Time is a precious commodity in schools...We're in an era of accountability, of testing, that has become so zealous that some teachers may be afraid to teach anything that isn't directly correlated to something a student may see on a test."

He continued, "Since time is such a precious commodity in schools, teachers are protective of it, as they should be...But I don't want teachers to fear making the investment in foreign language because it won't be directly tested. The value of the foreign language is worth the investment of time."

- Teacher Evolving from Gatekeeper From 1998 until 2003, Superintendent Andrews managed a large program training 10,000 teachers to use open source materials to teach science and math. This experience ingrained in him the importance of allowing students to interact directly with content. "When students ask 'Why do I need to know this?' they are pleading for context. They are looking for meaning in the material that they are being taught, he stresses, and they want to connect it to the bigger picture.

As an example, he cites an event in which a class of Cleveland-area middle school students were publishing live weather data as a part of their science curriculum. "Two children [in the class] felt their contribution to people who were relying on them for accurate data was so important to the weather project that they broke IN to school on a snow day to submit their data," he exclaims. "Kids don't normally do that!"

To facilitate such excitement towards school, Mr. Andrews suggests that teachers' role is evolving, so they act less as "gatekeepers" to content, but more as "learning doctors" and "assessment gurus," helping students recognize how to interact with and comprehend content most effectively. It will be interesting to see how S.I.T.E.S tutors incorporate this philosophy in their teaching...