

Students must be ready for a changing world

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Rip Van Winkle awakes in Rowan County in 2008 and finds people talking to themselves with strange things hanging from their ears, notices the youngest Rowan citizens speaking 39 different languages, and hears a tremendous buzz about someone named Murdoch and a place called the Research Campus. Rip Van Winkle wanders anxiously around our community and finally finds a place to relax, a place he feels comfortable -- one of our schools. Mr. Winkle exclaims, "Finally a place that hasn't changed since I fell asleep!" Fortunately, this is not an indictment of Rowan-Salisbury Schools. Unfortunately, the story of Rip Van Winkle and schools is a joke whispered about the state of education nationwide.

It has been said the most visible change in the classroom over the last 80 years is that blackboards turned green -- and now, in some cases, are even white. Compare this environment with other changes from the last 10 years: Apple has created 14 different versions of the iPod since its initial release in October 2001; MySpace was created in February 1999; MySpace had its 100 millionth account registered on Aug. 9, 2006, and had more than 300 million accounts as of Feb. 3, 2008; MySpace registers an average of 230,000 new accounts every day; Wikipedia, the "free online encyclopedia anyone can edit," was launched in 2001. Can you imagine that the students graduating from our school system this spring went through fourth grade without knowing about any of the things listed above? Some of these same students probably updated their MySpace page with a minimized Wikipedia window open to complete a class assignment while listening to a new 32GB iPod Touch during the last week.

We have a challenge in education. How do we prepare our students for a world that is changing so rapidly that teachers are asked to educate students for jobs that have not yet been created? On Wednesday, Feb. 27, the Rowan County community is invited to learn more about the challenge of preparing our students for our changing world. On this date, Rowan Partners for Education (RPE) is hosting its first annual Education Summit to begin a community discussion on this major challenge. The keynote speaker for the summit will be education visionary Dr. Willard Daggett. Dr. Daggett delivers an enlightening, entertaining and motivating message and helps citizens to look at education differently by challenging assumptions about the purposes, benefits and effectiveness of American schools. Dr. Daggett inspires his audiences both to embrace what is best about our education system and to make the changes necessary to meet the needs of all students in the 21st century.

RPE recognizes the challenge we have in education is much more than a challenge for educators. The challenge we face requires knowledge and movement from the entire Rowan County community. Parents, businesses, churches, students and educators must debate, discuss and collaborate if we are to prepare our students for the future. Parents

must learn to stop asking, "Where are your textbooks and worksheets" and embrace podcast lessons. Businesses have to partner with schools to ensure the students go beyond just a mastery of core subjects. Employers need students with a work ethic, who can communicate effectively, understand the value of collaboration and display critical thinking and problem solving skills. Churches in the community should continue to build on a growing faith-based initiative, which actually renews the informal partnerships of years past, between congregations, schools and students. We know the footprints of local schools and churches overlap across our county's neighborhoods, and this overlap needs to be leveraged to assist our students. The voices of students must also be included in this dialogue. After all, students understand and embrace technology more quickly than adults. And, finally, educators, with the entire Rowan County community in lock step behind them, must redesign schools, classrooms and lesson plans to meet this incredible challenge.

It is time to embrace that education exists in the larger context of our society. It is time to admit the world is changing faster than we can print text books or develop new lesson plans. It is time to understand our students need to be prepared to succeed in unpredictable situations instead of reciting facts easily found in a Google search.

If you are ready to partner and address this education challenge, please plan on attending the Education Summit hosted by Rowan Partners for Education on Wednesday, Feb. 27. The summit will be held in Keppel Auditorium on the Catawba College Campus from 3:45-5 p.m. We will begin by identifying the challenge on the 27th and will continue with a community discussion on the issues with a public workshop in April.

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