RUSD shares success data for Academies of Racine

BY KATIE MATTESON

When Racine Unified School District Superintendent Dr. Lolli Haws introduced the master plan for the Academies of Racine in December 2015, the vision for the transformation of the high schools had already been two years in the making.

Then-Deputy Superintendent Dr. Eric Gallien led in the development of the new career pathways concept based on a successful model developed by Ford Next Generation Learning (NGL).

According to the Ford NGL’s mission: “Global competitiveness depends more than ever on the role of K-12 education in establishing the strong foundation essential for preparing a 21st century workforce...Ford NGL is a unique and comprehensive community initiative that brings together educators, employers and community leaders to implement a proven model for transforming secondary schools, which ultimately improves the regional workforce system.”

In the fall of 2016, the program became reality when the Academies of Racine launched at Case, Horlick and Park high schools with the Class of 2020 who entered their freshman year. The following fall, the Class of 2021 joined the ranks and this year the Class of 2022 began their journey.

With two years of data is the books, RUSD statistics (see graphics) point to success at all three academies in the areas of industry certifications earned, college credits earned, scholarships awarded, freshman participation in the SEE Your Future Expo, youth apprenticeships and co-ops, number of guest speakers and sophomore participation in site visits.

Now-Superintendent of Schools Dr. Gallien, along with Chief of Schools Daniel Thiel-en, Deputy Chief of Secondary Transformation Jody Bloyer and Racine Area Manufacturers and Commerce President and CEO Matt Montemurro...
gathered for a briefing with Belle City Magazine prior to a luncheon co-hosted by RUSD and RAMAC to update the business community on the Academies of Racine program, set for Wednesday, Sept. 26 at Roma Lodge.

“We anticipate that this event, now in its second year, will serve as an annual ‘State of the District’ for our partners at RAMAC and other stakeholders in the community,” Dr. Gallien said.

During the luncheon, Dr. Gallien said he and his team will report on the overall performance of the district, present the results of key initiatives and highlight the impact and return on investment of the Academies of Racine.

Dr. Gallien said that the district’s partnership with the business community is “not just a buzzword.”

“We need each other,” Dr. Gallien said.

Montemurro explained RA-MAC has been involved in the development of the program since the beginning in order to support local workforce development, along with other local partners such as Gateway Technical College, University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Higher Expectations, United Way, Racine County Workforce Development and more.

He said that his predecessor Jim Ladwig, traveled with a contingent of local leaders to Nashville to visit a NGL site while the group was exploring various models for transforming Racine’s high schools.

“Our companies are thrilled to work with the district on co-ops, youth apprenticeships and job shadowing for students and externships for teachers,” Montemurro said. “The business community has tremendous faith in Dr. Gallien and the

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work being done.”

Thielen explained that the transformation of business and civic engagement is one of the three framework strands in the Ford NGL model. The other two are the transformation of teaching and learning, as well as transforming the secondary school experience.

This reorganization transcends the high school and aligns with district-wide priorities contained in its five-year strategic plan called “Raising Racine 2022.” It lays out the district’s priorities:

1. Be the educational choice for families in the southeast region of Wisconsin
2. Accelerate higher levels of student performance
3. Close student achievement gaps
4. Ensure positive, engaging environments
5. Endorse learning paths for post-secondary training, college and career readiness for every student

These priorities are also linked to the district’s North Star Vision that “all students will graduate career and/or college ready” and its four Pillars of Excellence: Student Learning, Culture & Environment, Partnerships & Community and Financial and Operational Excellence.

Bloyer, who served as directing principal of Case High School prior to her new role, said that she’s seen a mindshift happening among the students since the introduction of the Academies.

“They definitely see the connection between what they’re learning in school and the workplace,” Bloyer said. “And they appreciate the new opportunities that the new structure creates.”