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## **Larson: quality schools are fabric of the community**

By David Larson, Ed.D.

Superintendent, Glenbard Township High School District 87

When the boys basketball teams from a big school powerhouse and small rural school converged during the 2022 IHSA state series, the differences between their schools and communities quickly melted away.

Glenbard West High School has 2,364 students, and Scales Mound High School has 81 students. Glenbard West is in a town with nearly 28,000 residents. The village of Scales Mound, in far northwestern Illinois, has 450 residents. Many students in Scales Mound live on a farm and are members of Future Farmers of America. Glenbard West students live in the suburbs.

One thing the players had in common was that members of each team started playing basketball together when they were in elementary school. The IHSA state finals were the culminating games for these young men.

### **Basketball Bond**

The two schools' boys basketball teams saw each other at the IHSA boys basketball super-sectional in DeKalb, and then were assigned to the same hotel in Champaign for the state final tournament. They made a quick connection and exchanged a mutual respect for one another:

- When Glenbard West students arrived at the hotel, the Scales Mound students were there to greet them with enthusiastic applause.
- Glenbard West players gave Scales Mound players their fan T-shirts and excitedly chanted, "Scales Mound, Scales Mound" from the State Farm Center basketball court up to their new friends in the stands.
- Players from both teams shared supportive posts on social media.
- Throughout the tournament, they bonded. Scales Mound students knocked on the hotel room doors of Glenbard West students to share pizza.
- Scales Mound finished third in state, but remained in Champaign and cheered on Glenbard West in the championship game.

### **Community Pride**

High school athletics bring a community together. Community members bond over basketball, baseball, football, softball, volleyball and more, whether they play the game or just enjoy watching sports. It's great to see how excited families and alumni from decades ago get about our students competing at the local and state levels. During the basketball season, it was not uncommon to see young children excitedly ask our students to autograph their T-shirts. The community has great pride in our students, and our student athletes show their appreciation by not just playing for themselves, but for their community.

**Positive Culture**

Community pride and support bleeds into all aspects of a comprehensive high school. A culture of positivity, connection and support are key to students' having a sense of belonging.

Our students understand the importance of collaboration, resilience and building strong relationships. They believe if you work hard and work together as a team, you will be successful. The lessons that students learn in athletics and other extracurricular activities will benefit them throughout life.

I am a firm believer in the valuable connection between athletics and academics. I have repeatedly seen successful student athletes achieve at the highest academic levels. They do this with the support of their families, faculty and community members.

Regardless of where you live, quality schools are the fabric of the community. Thank you to all who support students in Glenbard, in Scales Mound and beyond.