

NEW SUPERINTENDENT UPDATES

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The Importance of Reading

As I work in school districts conducting coaching sessions for teacher evaluators I have the opportunity to observe in many different types of classrooms at all grade levels. As I observe students engaging in their own learning I am reminded of one district's strategic goal "To have all third grade students at the third grade reading level." Many research projects have concluded that "Reading proficiency by third grade is the most important predictor of high school graduation and career success." ISBE has set a goal of "Ninety percent or more third-grade students are reading at or above grade level."

I believe that reading at grade level is the most important goal we can have for students. Every district should have this goal as a top priority and invest in resources to maximize the potential to reach this goal.

We have been working on developing a new administrators academy around the topic of "Essentialism." One of the main components of essentialism is "trade-off." In order to maximize resources around one goal then we have to be willing to give other things up. If we really think reading is the most important aspect of education at all levels, but especially by third grade, what are we willing to give up to make that happen?

Vocational Training Pays Off

Recently my wife and I had an interior decorator come to our house to help us select colors because we are re-painting the interior of the house. As usual, we entered into conversation concerning children, family, etc... The interior decorator and us both have adult children and the decorator's children attended my school district when I was superintendent.

Her oldest son had taken several high school multimedia classes. An Industrial Arts teacher had developed the program over a 30-year time period and he taught all the classes. The classes were taught in a professional looking television studio at the high school. The students wrote all their own stories, produced their own programming including news, sports, current events, etc... In addition, the students filmed almost all varsity athletic events, music concerts, and school board meetings. All of these programs were aired on the high school TV channel that was available to our district residents via the local cable provider.

Her son enrolled in a series of classes taught by this instructor for all four years. She was telling us that he is now a movie producer in Hollywood and recently won an Emmy. The student honored his former teacher by producing a film about the work of the teacher. This student with

cooperation from fellow former students rented the Springfield Arts Center, invited ex-students and honored the teacher.

My point in telling this story is that there are many careers for our graduates. While I would agree that we would want all students to be college and career ready, we need to make sure that at the least our students are career ready. The above referenced student, according to his mom, was a marginal academic student until he enrolled in the multimedia production program. After seeing the value of academic skills due to the multimedia class, his grades improved drastically, especially his English grades. He did attend and graduate from a major university but his vocational multimedia class gave him the direction and the motivation to succeed both in college and in his career.

I think the reformers should change “College & Career Ready” to “Career & College Ready.”

9 Etiquette Rules That the Boss Shouldn't Break

I sent a Twitter link to the following story but I think it has such great insight I have decided to copy the article and make it part of this Update. This article contains great advice for leaders, and you may want to incorporate some of these tips into your everyday routines.

- 1. Don't Always Stay Behind Your Desk:** For everyday conversations about budgets, meetings, or reports, you can remain seated behind your desk. But for anything that's not part of the daily routine—meeting a client, an interview, a review—stand up. If you welcome that person and shake his or her hand while standing over your desk, you set up a power play. You seem in charge, yes, but also dominating and impenetrable, which will hurt any attempt for an honest or frank conversation. Some business executives keep a separate table in their office for occasions like this.
- 2. Don't Skimp on Small Talk:** Granted, small talk can prove uninteresting—who really cares that much about the weather—but this basic information helps your employees connect with you, says Whitmore. “The small talk is extremely important,” she says. “You must have the BLT factor: believable, likable, and trustworthy. The only way to get to know someone is through that BLT factor.”
- 3. Don't Use Text-Messaging Slang in E-mails:** Your spouse or child may understand what ‘lol’ means when you shoot them a quick text message, but in an e-mail to your client, it looks sloppy and inappropriate. Treat initial e-mail exchanges like business letters. As you get to know the person you e-mail with, you can write more casually. Something to always avoid though: emoticons. If you're happy, then just write that.
- 4. Don't Avoid Compliments:** Some bosses think positive feedback will encourage employees to start coasting. But no compliments to your employees at all, and you'll soon end up with a disgruntled herd. Find a justified compliment to pay someone, and make this a regular occurrence, says Susan Sommers, who runs Dresszing, a business image consultancy. “I think it's important for bosses to recognize talent and help talent grow because that's what keeps a company vital,” Sommers says.
- 5. Don't Offer Casual Comments about Clothes:** This comes down to how you phrase it. If

you think your employee looks nice, try something like, “Thank you for always looking so professional,” Sommers says. An offhand mention about their style or clothes can seem like a come-on. “You don’t say to someone of the opposite sex, ‘I love your shirt,’” Sommers says. This is treacherous territory, and Sommers advises her clients to generally avoid this if at all possible.

6. **Don’t Dress Sloppy:** You will set the tone for work attire. First ask yourself what the day will bring. If you’re a lawyer in court, then a suit makes sense, says Barbara Pachter, author of *Greet! Eat! Tweet!: 52 Business Etiquette Postings to Avoid Pitfalls and Boost Your Career*. But for an Internet start-up, a polo with khakis makes sense. Also, your clothes must fit well. Nothing should hang loose. Wear items neither too big nor too tight.
7. **Don’t Add Employees on Social Networking Sites:** When your employees or clients go home at night and log onto Facebook, it’s likely a respite from the workplace and a way to connect with people outside of the office. If a boss adds them on Facebook, they can feel nervous about what to share and who to associate with. “They may not want you on there, so don’t ask,” Pachter says. You should avoid making first contact on social networking websites like Facebook and Twitter. If your employees reach out to you, go ahead and accept.
8. **Don’t Forget Your Facial Expression:** As a boss, you’ve likely figured out a good poker face for negotiating. No doubt you’re still developing that. You should always work on your “boss face.” A boss that scowls drives employees away. A boss that grins encourages an overly lax atmosphere. Shoot for an expression of concentrated attentiveness, and flash that smile when necessary, says Pachter. “Often times you don’t realize it—that standard facial expression,” she says.
9. **Don’t Engage in Water-Cooler Talk:** A gossipy boss can seem insincere and even untrustworthy. This means you should not share too much of your personal life and avoid pointed questions to your employees about personal areas, like marriage, finances, and children. Vicky Oliver, author of *301 Smart Answers to Tough Business Etiquette Questions*, suggests sticking to discussing the business world, the competition, or other broad topics. And if a rumor spreads about the inner workings of your company, you should address it directly. “What you don’t want is an atmosphere of closed doors and whispered exchanges,” says Oliver. “It will kill morale and kill productivity. It just creates an atmosphere of distrust where gossip rules.”

Tip of the Week

Stay positive in your communications with staff, parents, and community, no matter what the circumstances. Share the positive messages about what is happening in your schools. Celebrate your school and student successes. Perhaps time could be dedicated during each board meeting to have students and/or educators communicate the positive accomplishments in your schools.