

NEW SUPERINTENDENT UPDATES

By Dr. Richard J. Voltz



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Respect and Rapport, the Key to Effective Communications:

I often tell a story about a HS principal I once observed when I was conducting Instructional Rounds training in his school. I reported to the high school office to meet the principal. The secretary told me that the principal was at the entrance to the school greeting students. She directed me to the location and I proceeded to meet the principal. The principal was in front of the high school greeting each student by name as they approached the school. In addition to greeting the students he was shaking the hand of the students he was greeting and would say something personal to the student concerning either the student's school or personal life. I was impressed that he seemed to know the names of the students and also knew something personal about them. This was a large high school of around 2,000 students with a very diverse student population.

While we were conducting the instructional rounds I observed that every teacher in the high school greeted the students as they entered their classrooms before the final bell rang and also addressed the students by first name and said something personal to the student. This was observed in every classroom I visited in the building.

Later in the day I observed around 200 students in the school cafeteria during a time period that was not lunch. The students were engaged in a variety of activities including watching TV, eating snacks from the cafeteria, studying, reading, talking in small groups, etc... When I asked the principal what the students were doing at this time, the principal told me that these were upper-class students who had a B average or better and also had no discipline referrals. These students were allowed to be in the cafeteria with "free time" instead of being in a study hall. The real amazing aspect of this "free time" was that there was only minimum supervision from faculty (one teacher aide was supervising). When I asked the principal about the apparent lack of supervision he told me they never have problems in the free study time because students know if they ever cause problems they will never have the privilege again. I also think the reason they did not cause problems was because of the obvious respect and rapport between administrators, teachers and students as evidenced by the greetings all staff were doing daily with their students.

While I have told this story many times I do not know of any school staff that has applied these adult behaviors in their school, until last week! I was doing evaluative coaching in an urban high school that has many challenges. This high school has a new principal

this year. This principal participated in my Advanced Danielson training this past August and was present when I told the above referenced story.

On Friday when I arrived at this urban high school I observed the principal in front of the school greeting every student who approached the school with a “Good Morning” and often with a personal greeting such as “Congratulations to you and the band on your first place rating,” “You cheerleaders did a great job at the pep assembly yesterday,” “I heard you mother was sick, how is she doing?”

I had worked in this school district last year and the respect and rapport between school’s administrators and teachers and their students was not good. This year the school feels and looks like a totally different place. I know that the simple act of greeting students at the entrance of the school is not the only reason this school has transformed but I think it is a driving force for the change.

In this toxic political climate of today it is so refreshing to see school staff treat students with respect and dignity and students return the same to their teachers and administrators. Maybe we need our politicians spending some time greeting their constituents, shaking their hands and saying something personal about their lives. You have to give respect to gain respect.

Embedded Principal Development Works Better

Most of us would probably agree that the “one and done” type of professional development for either teachers or administrators does not work well. The next obvious question is to ask then why do districts continue to provide this type of training for teachers or administrators. It would be much better if the initial training was followed up with specific one to one coaching that would actually change practice.

Every Illinois administrator must take one ISBE Administrative Academy credit each school year. IASA has encouraged districts to tie this professional development to district goals and invite presenters to train all the administrators in the district at the same time. This type of training offers several advantages over each administrator choosing their own training. They include 1) matching the training to district goals; 2) all administrators receiving the same training; 3) the district central office staff making the decision on the training topic; and 4) is much more cost effective than sending all administrators to separate trainings at a per person cost and also paying for travel and possible lodging expenses.

In addition to the above-mentioned advantages it would be best practice if the initial training were followed up with additional individual or group actual practice incorporating the training into the administrator’s daily work. IASA offers this exact form of training. Many districts have contracted with IASA to provide teacher evaluator training. The latest edition of teacher evaluator training is titled “Advanced Danielson Teacher Evaluation Training” and includes instruction on 1) proper documentation of classroom observations; 2) concentrating on specific domains and components based on a

research based protocol; 3) conducting a reflective conference with the teacher to improve the teacher's performance; 4) coaching practices that result in changed teacher practices; and 5) having difficult conversations with teachers who fail to improve.

Several districts have contracted with IASA to offer follow up training/practice for their teacher evaluators. During this training/practice, Dr. Voltz actually accompanies the teacher evaluator as they collect evidence and have reflective conversations with the teachers. This is "real" professional development for the teacher evaluators as they get to practice their work with an expert evaluator providing input, guidance and coaching.

If your district is interested in providing either the Advanced Danielson training or the specific coaching of individual teacher evaluators please contact IASA at 217-753-2213 or kherr@iasaedu.org or rvoltz@iasaedu.org for more information.

I don't have the time to observe teaching?

One of the six elements of the Voltz Protocol for effective teacher evaluation is "Observe More." When discussing this concept with practicing administrators I often receive silent feedback. Practicing administrators are probably reflecting on their current workload and trying to determine how they can free up time to do more observing.

I sometimes follow up with a rhetorical question such as "What do you do that is more important than improving teaching and learning in your position as a school administrator?" This is certainly rhetorical because there are various duties that parents, school boards and other educators would say are very important for school administrators, such as student, staff and school safety obligations. In these difficult times of post Columbine and Sandy Hook the public views school safety as extremely important. I would argue that in the days following the Sandy Hook tragedy nobody was worrying about teacher observations, everybody was thinking about how to make the schools safer.

There are many duties of school-based administrators but certainly improving teaching and learning is at the top of the list. Administrators need to examine just how they are spending time while at school. I would recommend that each school-based administrator keep a personal diary of just what they are doing on a daily basis. This diary should then be reviewed and analyzed to determine which tasks are vital to the administrators' leadership role and which could be dropped or be performed by others such as the school secretary, support staff and others.

As a building principal myself, I developed a teacher observation/evaluation system in which I observed every lesson of a teacher's entire unit including the day the teacher handed back the graded assessment. As a result of this process I discovered that the day the teacher handed back the graded assessment might have been the most important day of multiple observation visits. How many teacher evaluators schedule an observation visit for the day the graded assessment is given back to the students? This is a great day to see the following: 1) How students actually performed on the teacher

prepared assessment; 2) What the teacher did with the actual results, did the teacher address the need for some students to have remediation and continued instruction? Did the teacher address those students who scored very high to see if they knew the material before the unit? 3) How the students reacted to their student attainment scores? and 4) Discuss with the teacher in a reflective conversation about what the teacher learned from the graded assessments.

Many ask how I was able to observe a full unit of instruction. The answer is really simple, I scheduled the observations in my calendar and barring an emergency I always observed when scheduled. The teachers learned to trust that I would attend every class, they welcomed the daily feedback, and they trusted my input because I was putting the time and effort into working with them to improve their teaching.

In some schools student discipline becomes an administrative chore. You notice I used the word “chore” and not the word “responsibility.” I think it is important that classroom discipline is a responsibility of the teacher, not the building level administrator. My experience has taught me that only some teachers send disruptive students to the office. These teachers usually lack in traits related to 2a. creating an environment of respect and rapport with students, 2b. establishing a culture of learning, 2c. managing classroom procedures, 2d. managing student behavior and most importantly, 3c. engaging students in learning. Administrators should hold teachers accountable for these components within the Danielson frameworks when teachers send students to the office. I have found that when teachers release that disruptive student it may be a result of something they did or did not do, they learn to manage and instruct their classes more effectively.

In the end the real issue is not that building level administrators do not have the time to observe teaching, it is that they do not CHOOSE to spend their time observing teaching. What gets measured gets done; this counts for teacher evaluation also.

Levy Information

Levy time is fast approaching.

Important points of emphasis for the tax levy process include the following:

- “Each school district is required to certify annually and return to the respective county clerk(s), on or before the last Tuesday in December, its certificate of tax levy.” Thus, you will need the school board to formally approve the levy at a December school board meeting prior to the last Tuesday.
- You also need to have the Board approve an estimate of the aggregate levy at least 20 days prior to the adoption of the final levy.
- “Any district proposing to increase its aggregate levy more than 105% of its prior year's extension, exclusive of election costs, must publish a notice, as prescribed by law, in a newspaper of general local circulation.” You will need

to follow this procedure correctly. This notice must be published no more than 14 days nor less than seven days prior to the date of the public hearing.

Tip of the Week

As your school administrators start to get into the swing of conducting teacher evaluations, you may want to review a sample of the actual evaluations being written. When I was new to a school district, I would randomly read evaluations to get a feel for the way administrators were handling or writing evaluations.

My own personal philosophy on non-tenure teachers was to recommend non-renewal for any first year teacher (in this school district) that had areas needing improvement. Experience taught me that we should only keep those teachers we thought would be “excellent” teachers. The year to make this decision is the first year before that particular teacher has established connections with other teachers, the community, and parents.