

NEW SUPERINTENDENT UPDATES

By Dr. Richard J. Voltz



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The Value of Taking Time for Self

I am asked to present at IASA Region meetings on a regular basis and region members are very interested in the political landscape in Springfield as it relates to education. I confer with IASA Director of Governmental Relations Diane Hendren and she gives me the current political news to pass on. I put my own spin on this material and hopefully members learn a little something they can use in their role as a school leader.

In addition, this year I have been sharing a shortened version of a new administrator academy that I am leading. The title of this academy is “Moving from Vision to Action: Learn How to Become an Essentialist.” This academy was developed by Dr. Lynn Gibson, Dr. Kim Suedbeck and Dr. Terri VandeWiele on behalf of the IASA Professional Development Committee. Lynn, Kim and Terri do one version of this academy and I lead another version.

My version centers on “Work – Life Balance” and is a result of some serious past health problems that I encountered and how these have changed my life. I often write in this space about health, diet and exercise because these are three integral aspects of my own life.

As I look at and communicate with school leaders across Illinois I have noticed that many leaders are not taking time for self. The job of school superintendent is very complex and time consuming. In this digital age superintendents can find themselves immersed in work virtually 24/7. When you are working 24/7 when do you have time for self? How about time for family, faith, and friends?

A chilling metaphor I use in this academy is a message I received from a veteran school board member in my first superintendency. I was working late in my district office one night (about midnight) when I was startled to hear someone knocking on the window behind my desk. I turned around to see this veteran school board president. He motioned for me to open the office door and when he entered the office he asked me what I was doing working at midnight. I told him I was working on the next year’s budget and he responded with the following: “No one is going to put on your gravestone that you were working on the school budget at midnight, get home and spend time with your family.”

At a recent region meeting a superintendent talked to me following my work-life presentation. He communicated his experience in setting personal goals as a result of the IASA School for Advanced Leadership (ISAL) training he had completed. He told me that he has adjusted his personal schedule to make sure he spends quality time with his wife and children. He reported to his board of education that he had made this a personal goal as a result of the ISAL training. To his surprise, the entire school board not only backed his goal but has made modifications in the role expectations for his superintendent position. My advice to those of you reading this article, start making some personal goals to spend more time with family, faith, self and friends. You will not regret these new goals.

Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain

A principal who was participating in one of IASA's Advanced Danielson academies asked me on a break if I had read the book *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain* by Dr. John J. Ratey (*Spark*). This principal knew I was a runner and thought I might be interested in the book. I am always looking for books to read (I do not really read most of these books; I listen to the book on my iPod while I am running). I recommend this book for all school administrators, all physical education teachers and really all teachers.

Author Dr. John Ratey gives detailed scientific evidence about how exercise improves learning in students; Dr. Ratey outlines 7 specific conditions including anxiety, depression, and ADHD among others; which can benefit tremendously with appropriate and adequate physical activity. I believe if you read this book you will transform your schools and make fitness a critical component of your district's curriculum.

This works!

For the past few years I have been working with a variety of school districts around IASA's newly developed administrators' academy titled "Coaching Teacher Evaluators to Effectively Rate Teachers" (AAC #1787).

This is the actual application of the teacher evaluation material gained in the administrators' academy. I collect evidence along with the evaluator and then the evaluator and I reflect on this information immediately following the activity. Often I also shadow the evaluator while they are conducting the actual reflection conference with the teacher. In almost every case when I do this work the teacher evaluator wants more shadowing. They reflect with me and tell me this was the most powerful learning experience they have had as a school administrator. Contact me at rvoltz@iasaedu.org or 217-741-0466 if you want additional information on this topic or you would like to schedule this professional development for your teacher evaluators.

Tip of the Week

Take my suggestion above and have your administrators and teacher leaders read the

book *Spark* and then conduct a study session on how you could incorporate the concepts in this book into your schools.