

NEW SUPERINTENDENT UPDATES

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Educating Students Is Hard Work

This past weekend my wife and I traveled to Grand Rapids Michigan to support our daughter, Jennifer LaFrance, as she ran in the Last Chance BQ.2 Marathon. BQ stands for Boston Marathon Qualifying. This is the last marathon of the year to qualify for the Boston Marathon. Jennifer qualified by beating her qualifying time by seven minutes.

This article is not only about Jennifer's accomplishment, it is also about the conversation between Jennifer (Bloomington Junior School Teacher), David (Jennifer's husband and Principal at Oakland Elementary School, Bloomington), Linda (my wife who is taking over for a maternity leave of a Speech Language Pathologist in the Bloomington School District) and myself. Jennifer, David and Linda were catching me up on their education related activities of the week. I was exhausted just listening to their stories. Three educators working 60 plus hours in the preceding week (Jennifer and David also have a five year old and 18 month old sons) devoting their work to the students they teach and lead.

We as school administrators need to support the hard work that is being done by our teachers. We need to not only recognize the hard work but also provide meaningful feedback to our teachers to make their work even more effective. Recently I read a post by teacher Kevin Bibo titled Is Teaching Hard Work? (this was the motivation for this blog post). In this post Kevin states "I know what kind of a teacher I am and where my strengths and weaknesses lie. I reflect on my teaching. I don't need to be critiqued, reviewed, or judged by anyone else. In fact it's embarrassing when administrators walk into my classroom, stay for five minutes to observe as I am working with students, and then leave me a "report" concerning how well I am doing. Please. My point is that teacher reflection is up to the teacher and you are your own best critic."

I agree with Kevin that an administrator who would leave a "report" without having a reflective conversation with the teacher is wasting time for both the teacher and the administrator. Teachers and administrators need to reflect together following an observation and the purpose of the reflection is to improve the teaching and learning that is going on in the classroom. Real change for adults only occurs when the adult decides they are going to change their own behavior. This is why the teacher needs to commit to the reflection objectives that they agree will work in their classroom.

Should Evaluators Expect All Teachers to Be "Excellent"

When I conduct teacher evaluation training I always ask teachers and administrators to raise their hands if they are parents or grandparents. I then ask them to keep their hands raised if they want their children (grandchildren) taught by non-excellent teachers. Nobody keeps his/her hand raised.

If nobody wants non-excellent teachers then it is our role as evaluators and teacher leaders to make sure all teachers are excellent/distinguished. The first part of this goal is to make sure that excellent is obtainable for all teachers. Kindergarten teachers as well as AP English Literature teachers as well as teachers of severely mentally handicapped students must have the possibility of being rated excellent.

Evaluators need to make sure that they explain to teachers by grade level, subject, and ability level of students what methodologies the teachers need to exhibit and actions the students need to display that would meet the excellent level in the Danielson Frameworks. The evaluator cannot change the description or the critical attributes in the Frameworks but they do need to explain what it looks like. This is very important in the early years of the implementation of any new teacher evaluation system such as the Danielson Frameworks.

What if a teacher tells an evaluator that he/she is fine with being rated "proficient?" My response to this declaration is the following: "It is not fine with me that you are proficient. The goal of this school is to have all teachers reach the excellent level and I and your fellow teachers are here to help you get to that level." In addition, component 4a in the Danielson Frameworks is "Reflecting on Teaching" and 4e is "Growing and Developing Professionally." A teacher who makes the preceding remark about being fine with the proficient rating would by definition receive an unsatisfactory rating in both of these components. Teachers must reflect on their own teaching and they must strive to grow professionally.

Tip of the Week

Remember to have balance in your life. Spend time with family, friends, and faith. Spend time taking care of yourself by exercising and eating healthy foods.