

The Spartan Sentinel

...inspiring and equipping our students...

Volume 2, Issue 16

Friday, November 8, 2013

Team,

Good morning! I hope you've had a great week. Well, **tonight's the big night!** Food-a-thon Dodge Ball Game! This morning I was able to go on the radio with the other principals involved in tonight's activities and I was remind of how this food drive is just a really great way to teach our kids about kindness, generosity, enriching others, and leadership. Steve from CCS shared that they're assisting about *600 families per month* right now! I can guarantee you some of those families are Jefferson families, so what we do tonight will directly benefit our students. Thanks to Angela and Sandy for heading up the food drive effort.

This week I had the chance to get my CPI certification renewed. If you're unfamiliar with CPI it stands for Crisis Prevention and Intervention. Most staff members think that it's about how to do non-violent physical restraint for physically acting out students, and while that is a part of the program, the majority of the program focuses on how to address, and hopefully de-escalate students who are in conflict. In fact, I'd say 80% of the program focuses on the de-escalation. Anyway, this week, I went through my recertification for the program.

I have to tell you, my attitude going into the training this week wasn't great. It was an evening class, so I left right after school and the class was scheduled to go to 7:30pm. I wasn't excited about tying up my whole evening, and I knew none of the information I was going to hear would be new to me. I've been certified for about 8 years and I get a decent amount of practice in the techniques.

However, it was one of those nights where my *heart* was moved. The time spent was incredible! Our teacher, Scott Bauer, an MHT at the middle school and high school, always makes the learning come to life by sharing stories from his experience. We all know *telling stories is a great way to teach*, and Scott is a great teacher, so his stories really made the night fly by. Anyway, his stories hit home with me and they really brought me back to why I got in to education to begin with.

Scott shared how when he started as a mental health therapist, he saw way fewer “at-risk” and ED kids than we see today. In fact, in areas like Warsaw, we can now expect about 20% of our students to be considered “at risk.” We could talk all day about how factors like the breakdown of stable families, violent mass media, etc. have led to more kids who are struggling, but the reality is, every day we have more students walking through our doors that are at risk, so the techniques I learned about are critical to the success of our students and our school.

The thing that kept sticking with me was the fact *that for a growing number of our students we are the only positive adult in their life!* I was sobered by the hugeness of the responsibility that places upon our shoulders. How often do I get irritated or frustrated with a student and maybe I raise my voice or I don’t take the time to listen to them? Could it be that I have played the role of just another adult in their life that deals with them in that way? I felt convicted.

My mind kept coming back to the moment I decided to be a teacher. It struck me that I’ve really never shared this story with many people. Unlike some teachers, I never considered teaching as what I wanted to do when I grew up. I guess I was sort of “non-traditional” in that sense. When I was really young I wanted to drive trains (hence the office decorations!), then I wanted to be a police officer and maybe a marine biologist or a farmer....I was all over the place.

Then, on Spring Break of my junior year of high school, I went with my youth group to Chicago to work at a mission called Inner City Impact. The week was spent working in the day time at a local elementary school and in the evenings we did various work projects around their facility. That week, I felt God’s call upon my life to go into education.

All that week I worked in a 4th grade classroom at Von Humboldt Elementary School. The teacher in the classroom I was placed was incredible. She gave me lots of opportunities that were great for me. While some of my friends had to grade papers or make copies all week, I got to work with small groups of struggling readers, and she even let me teach a lesson by the end of the week!

The school was rough. I witnessed several fights throughout the week. There were three full-time security guards and many of the staff members were just out and out bad for kids. I witnessed a teacher who yelled at a kid who didn’t get a problem correct. She called him stupid. On top of that, the home life of many of these kids was terrible. Violence in the home was normal, and for many, 8th grade was as far as they expected to get. The neighborhood was rough; shootings weren’t uncommon. My heart was broken for these students. One student in particular grabbed at me. His name was Juan.

I spent a ton of time last night digging through boxes of old pictures to find the picture below of Juan and me that week. Juan was awesome! He opened up to me right away and told me all about things at home, which weren't good, and how even at age 10 he was thinking about quitting school. He had a ton of potential! He was funny and smart, but because of, among other things, the adults in his life, there really wasn't much hope for him. I remember crying so hard for him after we left that week. In the time I had with Juan, I began to realize *the magnitude of the power that teachers can have in the life of a student.*



So as I was sitting in my training this week thinking about all the “tough kids” we deal with every day, I was convicted about the fact that it’s so easy for me to lose sight of what’s really important. We get busy! School life is busy and stressful, and so it’s easy to get into a rut of just getting by. I didn’t know it then, but the reason I went into education is really echoed in our mission. I want to inspire and equip all students, even ones like Juan, to continuously acquire and apply knowledge and skills while pursuing their dreams and enriching the lives of others...no matter what their home life looks like.

See, the reality is, while that’s my heart, there are still a lot of things we do in schools that really don’t help at risk kids, ED kids, kids like Juan, or really any kid. When we raise our voices and yell at kids, we’re often reinforcing the negative way of handling problems that they see everywhere else. What about our grading practices? How do those sometimes reinforce hopelessness with kids? It’s tough, the way we’ve done things is hard to change, but we have to remember, school is a chance to change these kids! It’s a chance for you to show them that

there's a different way to live. Scott talked last night about how it's a slow process. They're not going to change overnight because of the way you work with them, but if we all work hard to treat kids with love and respect, year after year, the changes happen.

So anyway, there's no big "teaching point" I'm going for in this newsletter, and I know I'm rambling. This is more just reflection on my experience this week. I guess if I had to wrap it all up, I'd remind us all to *never take for granted the awesome privilege, and the awesome responsibility we have, to be a positive difference in the lives of these kids*. This is the greatest job in the world! It's a privilege because it's awesome to see the changes we make in kids' lives. It's a privilege because it enriches our lives too! It's an awesome responsibility because we're in a position to make a life better, or to be honest, we can help to ruin a life too.

So as we move through the holiday season, remember, *effective learning can't happen absent from relationship*. Do we really know our kids? Do we know what home is like for them? Do we know what they need from us? If you're struggling with a student, chances are the best thing you can do is sit down to lunch with them and get to know them. It'll help you understand where they're coming from and it'll show the student that you're going to love them no matter what. Kids need that assurance...we all need that assurance. I love watching you work with your kids and I look forward to watching all of us as we get better at doing the things that help our kids learn and grow as people!

