

# The Spartan Sentinel

*...inspiring and equipping our students...*

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Team,

Good morning! Can you believe it's November already? The year is certainly flying by! It's been a great week and I've had the chance to be in many classrooms this week. I continue to be impressed with what I see. I'm consistently seeing high quality teaching practices, formative assessments, and great relationships with kids. Keep up the great work!



Recently, I saw this picture in an article about African Elephants. Did you know that baby elephants are the largest land animal at birth, yet they are an easy target for predators? They are born with very poor eyesight and are very clumsy, so they must rely on the group to survive. One technique that is often used is what you see above. The adults of the group form a circle around the babies providing a formative barrier from any outside attacks.

This week, I've been reflecting on the fact that *effective teams understand what's important and take the necessary steps to protect it*. In this case, the herd of elephants understands that the key to survival of their species is to be able to birth young, and raise them to adulthood. Mothers of all species take great care in those first few days, months, and years of life to ensure that their young are well taken care of. With these African Elephants, it's a group effort.

So, what does this have to do with us? If we want to be an effective team; if we want to thrive as a school (and it's assumed we do!), then just like that herd of elephants, *we have to understand what's important and do our best to protect that!*

What is important for us here at Jefferson? Well, we could probably talk all day about the things that are important and that need to be protected. First, I would say our mission is important. It's our purpose; it's what we've all agreed to do. ***Our mission is to inspire and equip all students to continuously acquire and apply knowledge and skills while pursuing their dreams and enriching the lives of others.*** How do we protect that mission? We ensure that everything we do here at Jefferson aligns with that mission. If it does not, we get rid of it or re-align it so it does.

But on a practical, daily interaction level, what do we need to protect? Well, as I reflected over the last week on this, one thing kept coming up in my mind: **instructional time**. As educators we have been tasked with the tall order of the mission above. We all know that students won't be inspired and equipped without hard work. The problem is our time with these kids is limited to 9:00am-3:40pm every day. That's just 6 hours and 40 minutes a day. Take out time for lunch, recess, restroom breaks, etc. and we're down to roughly 5.5 hours a day. My point is *our instructional time with our students is a precious commodity*. It's one that must be managed carefully. *We must do everything we can do to protect our instructional time*. As an effective team we have to understand that the time we have instructing our students is vital to their success. We must be stingy about what happens during those 5.5 hours a day!

So, how do we do this? Well, we each serve different roles in this protection of instructional time. As an administrator, I need to ensure that programming doesn't interfere with what you need to do with your students. I'm going to be very honest with you; this has been a challenge for me this year. There are so many great things going on, but everything is nothing! *If we try to do everything, we end up with nothing*. Interrupting the schedule for quality academic activities or saying no to some neat opportunities so that we keep the schedule set is a tough decision for me. I apologize for the times when I've fallen out of balance one way or the other. I know that's frustrating, so I do my best to make good decisions with our time. I think one thing that makes Jefferson special is the time we spend together as a

school “family” doing things like Family Groups, our assemblies, etc. Those are important activities for the kids, but as an administrator, I have to be careful in balancing that.

We’ve agreed to a master schedule. It’s got some non-negotiable blocks in it like 90 minute reading block and it’s got some places for you to have autonomy with your time. *The key is that your instructional time is maximized.* That happens when we stick to our master schedule. It happens when we’re careful with outside activities like extra recess. It happens when we ensure that our transitions are “tight.” One thing I’ve seen this week in many classrooms is teachers who have set up systems in their classrooms to ensure that the transitions are tight. In some cases it’s as easy as an egg timer. Other teachers are having contests with their kids. Either way, making sure that the transition from one activity to the next happens as quickly as possible is a great way to protect instructional time. There are some great ideas for tightening up transitions in Doug LeMov’s book *Teach Like a Champion*. If you’d like a copy, see me.

What I’m trying to say is we have great things going on here at Jefferson. The instruction going on in your rooms is incredible! Let’s work together, just like those elephants, to ensure that what’s important to us, in this case, instructional time, is protected. Keep up the great work!

Dave

