

The Spartan Sentinel

...inspiring and equipping...

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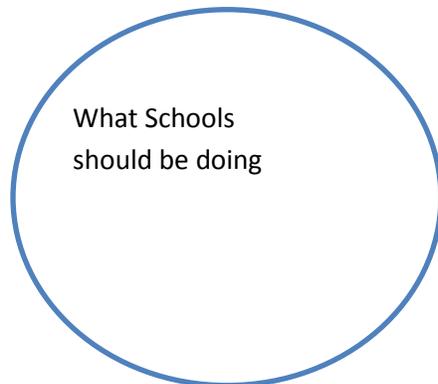
Good morning! Oh my gosh! This school is awesome! Last night, we hosted our 3rd Family Night of the year and I've got to tell you, I was BLOWN away! With the winter weather we continue to have and the busyness with the lead up to ISTEP testing, my expectations for turn out last night were pretty low. Well, I was certainly wrong! We had a PACKED library last night from about 6:20pm until 8:00pm for Family Reading Night. It was so heartwarming to see our families sitting anywhere they could find space in the library just reading books together! It was seriously so awesome! I want to say thanks to Mona for planning many of the events of the evening. Special thanks also to Dawn, Ashley, Sherie, and Donna for helping to work last night. It truly was a special event.



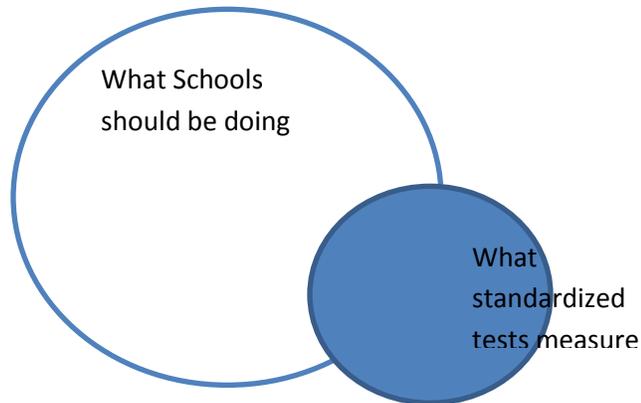
At one point last night, I looked at Donna and said, “*THIS* is what schools are supposed to be about!” I’m so proud of what we do here at Jefferson. I’m proud of the fact that it’s always about more than just grades and test scores. It’s about kids, and families, and individual needs. And yes, we’re not perfect and we always have room to grow, but by and large the focus of our team here at Jefferson is on people.

I was reminded of a good point made by Todd Whitaker in one of his books about effective school leaders. It has to do with the idea of Standardized Testing and our beliefs about those tests. We all have our own beliefs about standardized testing and whether or not it’s good or bad for kids. I think at the end of the day, we’re passionate about kids and loving them, yet at the same time we are required by law to administer standardized tests and nowadays we’re actually evaluated by the scores. Yesterday was a perfect example of the versatility required by schools today. I started my day with two ISTEP testing informational meetings and ended the night with Family Reading Night.

Whitaker makes the point that *regardless of what you believe about standardized tests, they matter!* There’s an important reason why. Think about all the things we do as a school, or all the things we *should* be doing. If we had time to talk about those things we should be doing and represented the things we agree on as a circle, it might look like this:



Now, if we were to represent what standardized tests measure, I think we would all agree that there's no way those tests can represent all we should be doing. So it might look something like this:



The figure above might represent the relationship between what standardized tests measure and what we believe we should be doing. Some of you may think the smaller circle should be bigger. Maybe you believe in the tests and think they should be a bigger part of what we do. Some of you probably believe that the blue circle should be even smaller. That there's no way those standardized tests can even come close to measuring all we should be doing.

The point that Whitaker makes is those standardized tests are important because regardless of what you believe about the relationship between what we should be doing and what standardized tests measure ***we must achieve success in the small circle or it will become the big circle!*** I don't think any of us want that.

Regardless of our beliefs about standardized tests, we all need to understand that they are important. If we don't succeed at them they will become all we are able to focus on. Think about it the opposite way. When those test scores are good, we feel the freedom to do more of the things we believe are important...like Family Groups, Family Reading nights, after school clubs, etc.

When I started here as principal, you all had just come off a year where Jefferson had earned a D grade from the state. When I talked to you about what that year felt like, there weren't many positives! You all were *stressed*. You were doing anything you could to get that grade up, and guess what? **YOU DID IT!** You never believed that D represented Jefferson and all we do. It was offensive to you.

That day we heard Jefferson had gone from a D to an A was a great day! My point is *we don't ever want to go back to being a D*. That year we were a D we *had* to focus almost all our

efforts and energy on bringing that grade up, because regardless of what we believe about the tests, or really the accountability system we're all a part of, at the end of the day it's the playbook we've been given.

So let's be excellent at everything we do. Let's ensure that we deliver a guaranteed and viable curriculum to all students, let's promise all students that they will get the help they need, let's help each other up when things are tough, let's do the little things well, let's be tight about PLCs and the collaborative team action cycle because we know it works. Let's keep doing the things well that we need to do to succeed with the "small circle" above so that it doesn't become our big circle.

At the end of the day it really comes down to what we see as student achievement. Is student achievement just a test score? Or is it more than that? Is it a test score, but also behavior, social skills, family values? Our mission is clear; student achievement is so much more than a test score....*it's about pursuing dreams and enriching the lives of others.* Standardized tests simply measure if we're helping students acquire and apply. We know that our higher calling is to help student reach dreams. I'm so proud of all of you because I see that value in each of you every day. Let's keep up the great work!

Dave