

The Spartan Sentinel

...inspiring and equipping our students...

Volume 2, Issue 4

Friday, August 9, 2013

Team,

Good morning! Well, it's time for the final countdown! It's hard to believe we'll be welcoming over 500 Spartans on Tuesday. I want to say thanks for all the hard work you've put in to get ready for the school year. It's been nice to see many of you as you've all been back hard at work.

This week I had the opportunity to travel to Lincolnshire, IL with Scott, Jamie Gill, Tracie, Dawn, and Jamie Stalter to attend the PLCs at Work Institute. It was an amazing three days! When you're learning so much in an intense setting like that it kind of feels like you're trying to take a drink from a fire hose, but it is well worth the brain-energy!

On Tuesday, I spent my day listening to Dr. Anthony Muhammad discuss creating a culture of collaboration. This was an absolutely amazing day, and while I believe that we have a very collaborative culture here at Jefferson, we can always grow and get better. Rather than try to think of some sort of analogy for what I learned, I'm just going to list some of my takeaways. It's my hope that you can take some time reading these and reflecting on your own practice and what you can do to promote a more collaborative culture here at Jefferson. Personally, the reflection for me this week has been convicting and it is helping me grow as well:

1. We MUST have the collective belief that all students can learn, and all children WILL learn because of our collective beliefs and behaviors.
2. Collaborative teams always ask, "Where are we flawed?" It's a growth mindset. We're not foolish enough to believe we don't have flaws that can be corrected.
3. Highly successful collaborative teams NEVER, ever speak negatively about students, parents, or colleagues!
 - a. *This one really got to me personally. Again, we've really been focusing on having a positive attitude here at Jefferson, but I still catch myself falling back into speaking negatively at times. We've got to choose to be positive and keep each other accountable if our kids are going to be all they can be.*
4. All teachers are teacher-leaders.

5. Criticizing underperformance is not leadership. How does that apply in the classroom? What about with evaluations?
6. Teachers and principals are in a relationship. In a relationship, if perfection is what you seek, it won't work. In relationships there will be frustration. Too often teachers and principals have unrealistic expectations for each other. That doesn't work in any relationship.
7. The key to a positive collaborative relationship is that there are clear expectations and commitments. Teachers need to have a means to communicate their expectations for their principal, and their commitments and vice versa.
8. When you're frustrated with a situation, turn your window into a mirror. Instead of looking out at everyone else, look at yourself. In what ways are you responsible for this situation? And what can you do to correct it? Start with yourself.
9. Your responsibilities should come before your rights.
10. When you vent habitually it creates a mindset of pessimism.
11. We complain to others to vent and to validate. We're looking for someone to validate our issues. The real problem is, venting is not productive. It may make you feel better that someone will listen to you or validate your point, but it doesn't do anything to remedy the situation. In the end, it promotes a toxic environment.
12. People in a toxic environment choose to complain. They do this by *describing* what they're upset about and *deflecting* responsibility.
13. In a healthy environment, people look at problems and they *reflect* on their own role in the situation, and they are *prescriptive* about what to do differently.

I know there's a lot to go over in those takeaways, but as we start the year, I'd like you to reflect on the situations that were most frustrating to you last year. How did you handle it? Were you descriptive and deflective, or were you reflective and prescriptive? We can do all the work in the world to set up the physical aspects of PLCs like norms, a meeting time, data tracking, etc., but it all means NOTHING if we don't all work to create a culture of collaboration. I know as I reflect, I've chosen to be toxic at times instead of choosing the positive route. Being positive doesn't mean things will be perfect. It just means when we encounter problems we choose to believe the best about each other and work together for a solution.

We all desire a successful year this year. Our success will directly relate to the mindset we choose. We're not going to get it right every time; we'll still catch ourselves slipping back into negativity or venting, but if each day we choose to be more positive than the day before we will LOVE working here and our students will be the beneficiaries, and let's be clear, it's a choice to be positive. Let's have a great, positive, collaborative year!

Dave