

You Can't Hit What You Can't See

Jan. 14, 2019

The start of a new calendar year is always an exciting time for me. I am not a big resolution maker, but I do find it important to engage in reflection on where I have been, where I am and where I am going.

I spent the latter part of the break and the first couple of days this month engaged in this same reflective process for our organization. I found myself looking critically at our current reality and the systems, programs and practices we have been implementing. I also was intentional about taking an honest look at where we have been, where we are and where we aspire to be. I must be honest and share with you that this process caused significant amounts of anxiety for me.

Simply put – we are not where we want to be, need to be or should be as a district.

Since I have been here, I have been intentional about sharing a hopeful and optimistic message because I am convinced that the work we are engaged in and the systems we are implementing will produce the desired results if we stay the course. But, our reality is since 2012 and the implementation of the STAAR system, our district has underperformed all others in the area.

As I have listened to root cause analysis and other explanations for the underperformance, I have heard that it was the economically-disadvantaged student population, the changing demographics, the different subgroups or some other specific area. However, all tested groups, whether it is white, black, Hispanic, economically disadvantaged or non-economically disadvantaged, in our district have performed at the bottom of Tarrant County schools since 2012. This is a brutal fact that has not been talked about and is one that we all must own and work with urgency to address. My focus moving forward is to ensure that we will be at the top of Tarrant County, but today we must realize that we have been at the bottom in almost every tested area since 2012.



As we begin the 2019 calendar year, **my word for the year is urgency**. I am committed to ensuring that the past will not continue to be the reality for the students we serve. I own our reality and I am challenging each one of you to do so as well. Owning the challenge begins with clearly recognizing the issue, seeing it, acknowledging it and accepting the responsibility for changing it.

We change student results by changing ourselves, improving our capacity, increasing our intensity and operating with a sense of urgency. The research around increasing student performance is clear and consistent. Student achievement improves when we:

1. Increase the alignment and relevancy of curriculum
2. Increase instructional time on task
3. Increase the quality of instruction and the capacity of teachers and leaders
4. Increase the level of student engagement and connections
5. Increase and improve relationships

The actions we have taken, and will continue to take, will be designed to impact the items listed above in some form or fashion. It will require us to do some things different in order for us to produce different results. I acknowledge that it will be hard work, trying work and work that may not be required other places, but for us to get where we need to be, it will require significant changes.

I was reminded of an experience I had in little league baseball. During my first time at bat with a pitcher, I was hit in the eye by a baseball and was rushed to the emergency room. I was in pain for a few days and wanted to begin considering other sports, but my father would not let me. He wanted me to get back in the batter's box because he knew if I did not face the pitcher again, I would always have an unnecessary fear of baseball. I reluctantly returned to baseball, but every time I got up to bat, I closed my eyes. Coach Hanks would always yell at me, "Country boy, open your eyes! You can't hit what you can't see!" As I was reflecting on our performance and thinking about my approach going forward, I heard Coach Hanks voice loud and clear. "Open your eyes! You can't hit what you can't see!"



Continued: You Can't Hit What You Can't See

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When we open our eyes and look at where we are and where we have been, you will realize that doing things in the way we have done them before will simply not work. We must be urgent and intentional about our time, we must find more time and better use the time we have. The current results are unacceptable and the students and families we serve deserve better, and it is our responsibility to make it so. **If you are behind in a race, you have to run faster to catch up and you have to do more than is required of others. This is what will be expected in order to remain on the Crowley ISD team.**

To be clear, the achievement gap is a real issue for our African-American students and Hispanic boys. They are experiencing significant gaps in learning on every campus. Our white students are performing at the bottom of all surrounding districts when compared with other white students, and both our economically disadvantaged and non-economically disadvantaged groups are performing at the bottom of Tarrant County.

This is our reality in 2019, and it has been so since 2012. In order for it to be different in the future, we must be prepared to do different. Our preliminary results show positive trends, and I believe if we stay the course we will hit our target.

With something to think about, I'm Dr. Mike McFarland, challenging us to open our eyes so we can hit what we see.

With gratitude,

Mike McFarland