

MONDAY MESSAGE

FROM DR. MCFARLAND



Will you notice?

November 13, 2017

I have had the opportunity to meet with many people about their hopes, dreams and aspirations for our district and the students we serve. In general, the folks I have spoken with are optimistic about the future and what it could mean for Crowley ISD. There is consensus around the possibilities ahead and the need for change. It is clear that most folks are hopeful about what is to come, and I am as well.

However, I realize and acknowledge that hope is not a plan. It will take a commitment to make the necessary changes required to educate the students in our classrooms today, not the ones we educated in the past.

I had several opportunities last week to be on campuses conducting site visit interviews with parents, teachers and students. These visits will continue for the next couple of weeks so I can meet with a small group at every campus. This gives me an opportunity to gather information that will be used as we develop our action plan to make Crowley ISD the **Top in Tarrant County**.



One of my most revealing discussions occurred with students when I asked them questions concerning perceptions, expectations and achievement. I asked the students, “How do you know that your teacher expects you to do well?” The consistent response was that teachers who expect students to do well notice when they do not. They notice, and they do something. They are disappointed, but they act to help students. **They will not let students fail!** The teachers who do not expect students to do well just give grades and move on. They fuss at students and move on. Every student nodded their head in agreement to the responses.

Then I asked, “How many of you in this room have intentionally not done your best work just to see if the teacher noticed?” They all raised their hand again. I followed by asking them, “So what does it tell you when a teacher does not notice?” One student responded that it tells them either the teacher doesn’t care or they didn’t expect them to do good anyway, regardless of what they say.

This short exchange with a group of high achievers was revealing. The students’ responses clearly supported my belief that simply talking about high expectations and proclaiming to strive for excellence will just sound like tinkling brass and have no effect, **unless we commit to acting and intervening when kids fail to meet our expectations.**

I have a former college classmate who works as a physician at a local hospital. She is an outstanding physician who loves her work and talks about it often. We were talking recently about the similarities between the medical field and education. I was curious about the medical model of examination, diagnosis, treatment and prognosis. Her comments about placebos were intriguing. There are numerous studies that scientifically validate what is known as the “placebo effect.” The placebo effect happens when someone’s belief that a medication will be effective in curing them is so strong, that they physically respond to the treatment, even if they are only receiving a neutral substitute such as a sugar pill.

This got me thinking about educators and our ability to impact lives by the perceptions and beliefs we instill in our students. If the mind is so strong that it has the power to heal the body, then it certainly has the power to help individuals achieve excellence. We hold a tremendous amount of influence when it comes to building positive (or negative) beliefs in the people we serve through our words and actions.



This idea is critical to our work. It means that people will live up to what they believe are our expectations of their performance. In other words, **people will respond to the level of confidence you show in them.** Convey your belief in people through your involvement and the quality of your interactions with them, and they will meet or exceed your expectations. But if you have low expectations for an individual and they perceive that belief, they will never challenge themselves and rise above their perception of your low expectations.

Our students’ perceptions of our expectations for them act as a ceiling on their performance. **To raise their performance, we must raise the ceiling.**

To change perceptions, our actions must support our words, and we must be ready to intervene when necessary. We say we believe all students can learn, but they are not all learning. What will we do about it? Will we move on, or will we intervene? Will we acknowledge and address unmet expectations, or will we be guilty as charged with the crime of not noticing? **Excellence remains to be seen. Will you notice?**

With something to think about, I’m Mike McFarland, challenging all of us to notice.

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