

# MONDAY MESSAGE

## FROM DR. MCFARLAND



### Your beliefs, words and actions matter

February 19, 2018

During one of my recent trips to Austin, I decided to visit one of my favorite professors at Baylor University, Dr. Elizabeth Sharp. I recently learned that Dr. Sharp had been experiencing some medical issues, and was recovering in a nearby facility.

Dr. Sharp was a favorite professor of mine and many of my classmates at Baylor. She had such an optimistic outlook on life and it was obvious that she cared about her work and our well-being. She had a way of making you feel like you were the most important person in the world. It was clear that she had high expectations for all of us, and held us to a standard higher than we held ourselves. She would constantly engage us by asking deep-leading questions, and listen intently to our responses. Dr. Sharp spoke to the potential and possibilities of all of her students and you always left feeling like you could conquer the world. She believed in us and acted consistently on that belief.

When I stopped by to see her, we made small talk for a little while, and I caught her up on what was going on in my life and the lives of some of my classmates. Then, in her classic Dr. Sharp style, she began to ask a series of deep questions that I am continuing to wrestle with today.

***“What have you accomplished with your life?”***

***“What would you attempt if you knew it was impossible to fail?”***

***“How big is your dream?”***

***“Is it big enough?”***

***“How strong is your vision of success?”***

***“Is your vision compelling enough to discipline you to do the difficult things that most people want to do to achieve the success you desire?”***

***“What if you prepared and planned as if you could not fail?”***

***“What would it take?”***

It was like I was immediately time-warped back into our leadership development class 25 years ago. I told her I would have to think about my responses, and give them to her next time I saw her. This interaction occurred two weeks ago, and I have been thinking about my responses ever since, relating it to the work we are engaged in here in Crowley.



When I see her again, I am prepared to tell her it is my greatest aspiration to lead a team of educators and a school system, where we can prove students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and challenging economic situations, can perform at levels that are commensurate with students from more economically advantaged backgrounds.

Many of our students may be economically challenged, but they are superbly equipped with grit, perseverance and resiliency, and that makes all the difference in the world. They are not at-risk, but full of promise and potential. It is our charge to speak to their promise and potential, like Dr. Sharp did for me and my friends. My aspiration is to show that it is possible to succeed and break the predictive power of economics, ethnicity and its inverse relationship with academic excellence.

**You are critical to this process. This is our life’s work, and the most pressing and immediate challenge.**

As you prepare lessons and organize activities, ask yourself the questions above from Dr. Sharp. Also, realize that what you do on a daily basis matters, and it will have a direct impact on the dreams and aspirations of all children you come in contact with, especially those who may be on the margins.

Please remember that **our students are watching, listening and receiving the messages you are sending**, intentionally or unintentionally.

I challenge you to be explicit with your students about how you feel about them and their potential, if that feeling is positive and uplifting. If that feeling is not positive, I challenge you to do some soul searching about your motivation for continuing in this profession. As an educator, your thoughts, words and actions are magnified by the students you serve. How you think or feel about students truly matters and is not dependent on how they think or feel about themselves. What matters most is **what they think you think or feel about them, their capacity and their future.**

I challenge you to be intentional about letting your students know that you care about them. They need to know you have their best interest at heart and that you have high expectations. Whether you realize it or not, this matters and research has shown that it makes the difference. From a personal perspective, I am a witness. Dr. Sharp’s thoughts about me fueled my efforts when I didn’t even believe in myself. It was Dr. Sharp’s disappointment in me, when I didn’t apply myself like she knew I could, that made the difference. It was Dr. Sharp’s unwavering expression that confirmed my self worth and helped me succeed when I didn’t really see a way forward.

With something to think about, I am Dr. Mike McFarland, believing in your greatness and acting with intention and expectation to make it so.

**Dr. Michael D. McFarland**  
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