September 21, 2015

Good morning. It’s hard to believe that we are four weeks into the school year and the start of fall is right around the corner. Last week the Northside Education Foundation held its annual pillar recognition and fundraising gala. It is always an honor to meet the outstanding NISD graduates who have been chosen to represent the six Pillars of Character and this year’s group is no exception. All highly successful people, the profiles of our pillars can be found at: http://www.nisd.net/news/articles/56082. I look forward to these impressive folks visiting NISD classrooms and talking to future graduates about how to be successful by all of that word’s definitions.

The gala raised a healthy sum for the foundation, but the second largest fundraiser each year is actually the employee pledge drive. Our participation in the pledge drive sends a powerful message to potential external funders that we believe strongly in ourselves and our ability to provide the very best education for NISD students. If you haven’t done so already, you can fill out your online pledge form at: http://is-web02/Integration/Partnerships/NEFPledgeDrive

Also last week I participated on a panel speaking to a group of outstanding school principals from around the state. The principals have been nominated by their districts to study how to transform their schools into highly engaging and relevant learning communities. Several NISD principals have participated in this professional development in recent years. I started with this – there is no option to keep things like they always have been. We either have to thoughtfully transform – this is what I mean by the need for continuous improvement - or be reformed by outside forces who are not educators and likely don’t send their own children to public schools. If we sit idly by, our future will be controlled by others.

By way of specifics, I told the group about our ongoing conversation about the importance of differentiated instruction (DI) and how engaging lessons and work products fit perfectly into the larger concept of DI. I also told the group about our efforts to listen more to student voice in making decisions. I really want to compliment the middle school principals in Northside as they have done quite a bit to bring interested students into the conversation about what our classrooms and lessons should look like. I think this will help us improve our student engagement over time.

I also spoke about our continuing study of how we can use technology to enhance student engagement and give more options to teachers without simply using technology for the sake of it. Technology will never replace a high quality teacher, but it may give talented educators options to enhance rigor and choice in their classroom.

Finally, we all have challenging work to accomplish and sometimes we can lose sight of the big picture of what we are trying to accomplish by getting overly focused on the day-to-day minutia. For example, in our Maintenance Department, our goal is to have physical plants operating in a safe and comfortable manner to the benefit of students and staff. Period. Nothing else is as important as that. In our classrooms, our goal is to differentiate our instruction so that each student is engaged and interested in what they learn and pushed to work at a level of rigor that is appropriate for them. Nothing should overtake that goal. In our Business and Finance Department, the goal is to provide resources so that we all have the necessary tools to do our work - simple, but important.

Obviously, we could go on and on...The point is that we all have important work and we can’t let distractions and less significant issues get in the way of progress. Someone I have deep respect for recently sent me this quote from well-known author John Maxwell. "The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects it to change. The leader adjusts the sails." Let’s hold each other accountable for being good sailors.

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