



"Moving from a system of Schools to a SCHOOL SYSTEM"

SUPERINTENDENT'S UPDATE

October 17, 2014

Superintendent of Schools Larry Licopoli, Ph.D.

2014-2015: Focus on Literacy and Transition

1. Early Fall Highlights

a. Peekskill Pride and Response to the Guardian Academy Charter School of Peekskill:

With the opening of the 2014-2015 school year, the challenge of preserving our schools in response to a proposed Charter School in Peekskill was certainly not on our "radar screen." A Peekskill Pride Committee was formed to address the proposals found in the Guardian Academy Charter School of Peekskill's application to the Charter School Office of the State Education Department. While the organizational work that is necessary to make this team of school and community people work together for a common goal is very labor intensive and took some of us away from our schools and classrooms, the esprit de corp that was generated on behalf of our school system and children remains very positive. Our work is not yet done, but the display of affection and testimonials on behalf of our school system presented at the October 1 Public Hearing was wonderful to see and hear.

There is still time to write a letter in support of the school system. We anticipate hearing from the Charter School Office by mid-November as to the status of the Guardian Application. For more information on this subject, including sample letters and contact addresses, please [click here](#). Finally, I want to extend a special thanks to our staff, parents, students and community leaders for taking a position to preserve our programs and the Peekskill City School District.

b. Professional Development Update: As of this writing, each of our teacher leaders and principals have received their initial training in the following areas:

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| i. Framework for Instruction: | Teach Scope |
| ii. Literacy Coaches: | Lesley University |
| iii. Learning Walkthrough: | UCLA |
| iv. Teaching Reading in the Content Area: | McCREL |

The training has been vigorous and insightful, generating quality conversations relative to pedagogy and learning. Feedback has been very positive.

c. **Board Goals for 2014-2015:** Please [see this link](#) for the most up-to-date Board Goals and planning initiatives.

2. **School & Classroom Visits:** Please note that in the upcoming days, I will be making 5-10 minute informal classroom walk throughs. I look forward to seeing our students learning in your classrooms.
3. **Website:** Please check our website for the latest happenings in our schools and playing fields.
4. **Reflection of the Day: Marshall Memo #556,** Article from “Teach Like a Novice: Lessons from Beginning Teachers,” Phi Delta Kappan, 10/2014 (Vol. 96, #2, P. 13-18).

In this *Kappan* article, Jonathan Eckert (Wheaton College, IL) ruefully recalls the first time he was videotaped as a young 4th-grade teacher. Viewing the film later with his cooperating teacher, he was chagrined to see that a lesson that should have taken 10-15 minutes lasted for nearly 45, that most students were not engaged, and that he himself was bored within five minutes. But the coup de grace came when the camera panned to one side of the room and revealed a student lying prone on his desk for nearly five minutes, and Eckert wasn't aware of it until he saw it on video.

Eckert now teaches and coaches novice teachers, and he's put together these hard-earned pointers on classroom management:

- *Maintain a growth mindset.* This means seeing students' intelligence and talents as malleable – and having the same belief about one's own ability as a teacher.

- *Reflect – then reject, accept, or modify.* Teachers must be willing to try new strategies and then decide, based on the evidence (*Are students engaged? Are they learning more? How do I know?*) whether they're worth keeping and developing or should be dumped. One teacher thought she had a great listen-up strategy for her fifth graders by using lines from *The Lego Movie*: she would say “Everything is...” and students chorused, “Awesome!” But over the next few days this deteriorated as students began to continue the song; the teacher backed off and adopted a different method.

Eckert shares his most successful *talk-more-quietly* strategy from his own 5th-grade classroom: he had a picture of Elvis at the front of the room, and when students got too noisy, he would remove a piece of The King's clothing, each piece representing time taken away from their 15-minute Friday afternoon class recess. (Don't worry, the last step was a pair of swimming trunks that couldn't be removed.) “Students got to the point where they would quiet each other down if I even started moving toward Elvis,” says Eckert.

- *Employ extrinsic motivation.* Alfie Kohn's injunction to strive for intrinsic motivation notwithstanding, Eckert believes teachers need to use some extrinsic motivators – but *good* ones – as a pathway to the ultimate goal of learning for learning's sake. As a 7th-grade science teacher, he put students in teams and urged them to earn points for quality lab work, cooperation, and good performance in review games and class. At the end of each quarter, teams that earned the requisite number of points got to participate in extension labs that went beyond the science curriculum – for example, building carbon dioxide-powered cars. Teams that failed to earn enough points had to spend the week in the library writing 1-2-page reports on the science concepts behind the labs.

Eckert says that he never had more than one group a year that suffered the library consequence, and after that, students knew he was serious and every team earned their way into the extra labs.

- *Hold their attention.* New teachers tend to believe that classroom management is “a mystical level of nirvana to be achieved without regard for content or pedagogy,” says Eckert. Not true! An essential, common-sense ingredient is getting students actively involved in high-quality learning experiences. A review game, for example, will work if every student participates in buzzing with their team to get the answer to every question and there are fun rewards for success – not beating other teams but getting to use the basketball hoop, football toss, rubber-band cannon, or remote-control driving course.

- *Be demanding.* New teachers have to understand that when a student says, “She’s mean out of the goodness of her heart,” it’s a high compliment. “The desire to be ‘nice’ becomes very problematic for beginning teachers,” says Eckert, “and one of the primary symptoms is the number of warnings they give. One of the best pieces of advice is that there should be no warnings. Classroom interactions consist of a series of choices and consequences. When beginning teachers see their role as holding students accountable for their work and choices, they stop worrying about being viewed as ‘mean,’ and they stop giving warnings.”

- *Build important relationships.* Teachers need to do this especially well with their most challenging students. A starting point is greeting each student at the classroom door. Eckert required his middle-school students to give him a firm handshake, eye contact, and a meaningful greeting. “In addition to teaching life skills,” he says, “this communicated that whatever had occurred in the hall, in previous classes, or at home, we were going to learn and our relationship was important.” Another strategy is 2-by-10: engaging each struggling student in two minutes of conversation (about anything) for ten consecutive days.

- *Fill the classroom.* “Regardless of personality, introvert or extrovert, the teacher’s presence must permeate the classroom,” says Eckert. “This doesn’t mean that only teachers with outsize personalities can be successful. It means that students need to know that the teacher is always aware.”