

Ukulele Music

Keith: welcome to the LeeCoSchools Edcast with our superintendent here at Lee County Schools Dr. James "Mac" McCoy Kyle we had a really great conversation with Dr. McCoy

Kyle: we had a fantastic conversation with Dr. McCoy

Keith: from our conversation I got the same feeling that I've had from some of the other ones that we talk about is that this leadership style that I think is working in the county is definitely coming from the top

Kyle: it is

Keith: it's great I like it

Kyle: one of the things he mentions is when you ask a teacher what do you teach and they say science or math he thinks the answer should be well I teach kids and so being able to have some individual learning styles and be able to do some things that maybe outside of that industrial norm as long as it is for the betterment of the education that those children are receiving he's all about it as long as it's moral ethical legal he said hey let's do it I really appreciate that especially coming from someone as a superintendent you know I mean that's great yeah

Keith: so if you have any questions comments complaints criticisms compliments colloquialisms conundrums or concerns you can always find us on our web site at www.lee.k12.al.us/edcast you can also find us on Twitter @LeeCoSchools you can find us on facebook at facebook.com/LeeCountySchools and you can email us at edcast@lee.k12.al.us Kyle....

Kyle: Heeeeere we go!

Funky Transition Music

Keith: so Dr. Mac you're a you're a Georgia boy

Dr. Mac: born and bred

Keith: how did how did the Georgia boy find himself here in the belly of the beast here

Dr. Mac: that's a fair question when I was able to retire in Georgia that's kind of what you work for is retirement I knew I wasn't gonna be able to retire be able to just sit at home too young had too many things I want to do

Keith: What school system were you at before?

Dr. Mac: Commerce City is where I retired from I moved from one side of the state the other moving up the ladder so to speak and you know I taught for three years my high school coach bugged the principal that hired me to where I would coach and I and I did not want to coach because I played football all my life and I just didn't want to coach but I agreed for one spring practice and I went for five days and I said coach I can't I still want it more than the kids and I just wasn't comfortable with that so I went chose to go back to school at that point I got my master's degree and I applied in eighty something school systems I got two interviews the first interview went something like this I've got people with 27 years of experience and doctoral degrees why am I gonna hire you as an assistant principal and I said well you're

the one who called me in for the interview you have to tell me that I'm asking myself the same question and then the other one was he was a housecleaner a principal and he was hired to come in and clean up and he had two new assistant principals I was one and 50 new teachers he just he cleaned out

Kyle: Wow

Dr. Mac: but he gave me an opportunity and I went for that and I was an assistant principal for three years in Henry County and then went to Carrollton as a principal at a school that I knew was only going to be open for two years but I said to myself better to be a principal to get a principal's job then you know still looking so when I interviewed for that job I told Mr. Upchurch I said look I know it's two year stint but I'm going to make your job difficult when you hire the principal for the new school and he just kind of laughs and it was a great school system and the three elementary schools that were there two great principals and and I I knew I was the low man on the totem pole and when it came time he called me he says Mac he says you did make a difficult he said you've done a great job but I'm going with Judy now and I said that's great I said I've actually got an interview at County next to us he said I know I've already been called by the superintendent and you can be that principal if you want to go there but before you do that I want you to read this book and he pushed this book across the table and it was Dr. W Edwards Deming total quality management book about that thick and I looked at it and snickered and I pushed it back across the desk he slid it back he says no seriously the way you operate I want you to read I think this is the direction I want to take this school system and somebody like yourself I think can lead this long story short I read it went back said what do you have in mind I had the opportunity to actually go to Dr. Deming's classes for two years before he passed away and learned a lot learned a lot from him and I could you know I worked with Southwire company which was a local company there in Carrollton and they were doing TQM so we developed a total quality management system for a school system and implemented that after that went the Gainesville middle school and then to Buford City High School and then to Commerce cities as Superintendent so I've been I taught in elementary been a elementary principal middle school principal and a high school principal and then superintendent and so I figured I had the bases covered but boy what a shock because this job as a superintendent is not like a principal or anything else it is business and it took me about two years my first two years of superintendent to shake that off because I wanted to be involved and in the school and the daily decision then I couldn't and it was just a different different job so when I retired you know I looked at businesses and I had a couple opportunities to do other things and it just wasn't what I wanted to do and I saw just stayed at Commerce until this came open and my wife had family here that had been here about seven years prior to us coming and then our son happened our oldest son happened to move down here in his job and so when the job came open they said hey the Lee County job's open and I looked up Lee County and I said whoa that's a big county and I'm a little law school system I had 1495 kids at Commerce that's all we had so I applied and actually applied here and at Alex City they opened at the same time and Dr. Jenkins called me and says I've got you on the docket for Lee County one night interview and then the next night at Alex City for an interview I really feel like you're Alex City and I said well I do too because you know I have been in city school systems in Georgia all but three years of my career so I came here and interviewed I thought it went well you know it was a coin toss at the time and then I went to Alex City had a great interview and after one of my answers I have the audience stood up and applauded all right I felt really good about that and then I was cutting the grass one evening and phone ringing it was Mr. Stringer and he said have you made a decision about Alex City yet I thought I haven't had an offer anywhere he said well don't make a decision until you hear back from me and I said

okay so long story I'm here and glad to be here and it's been a so far I think it's been a good experience I've I've grown a lot and I still I think I learn something every day I've kind of calmed down in a lot of ways I've become more humble and I think in this job you know it's so yeah that's how I got here

Keith: and so you were so most of your experience was in the city school system and now you're in it so what are some of the big differences between the city and county other than well sheer scope and size

Dr. Mac: I made a statement at three years actually was a teacher for three years in the county and the assistant principal for three years in another County and then the rest of my time was in the city city school systems in Georgia are really different from city school systems in Alabama Georgia they're the politics around education is they're trying to do away with city school systems

Kyle: really

Dr. Mac: whereas in Alabama if you breathe and have three people you can have a city school system so you know so that's different almost here the county school systems are the Forgotten child and the city school systems are getting everything you want seems to be and it was just different in Georgia the biggest difference I think though it's not I mean you know volume okay that's fine it's a job I mean you're no matter what size school system you're in or where where you are in the school system it's about children it's about educating children of the best of your ability and surrounding yourself with great people that understand that and have the same desire to do that as you do and so but the biggest difference I found here was really the financial year the fiscal year we ran from July 1st to June and here you got two years of budget you know and it's just different and it took me a while to kind of grasp that concept but you know of course when I was in Georgia people make fun of Alabama and when I came to Alabama they were giving me a hard time and you know I went first time I went back I said the joke's on y'all because Alabama and it may not be everywhere in Alabama and it's not everywhere in Alabama it's not everywhere in Georgia but here in Lee County with what we have to offer it's rare that you have three really great school systems in an area like like we have in Auburn and Opelika and in Lee County and because of the revenue and because of a 85 and Hyundai and Kia and we are in a place that's like no other around and I feel very fortunate to be part of that but you know it goes back to what's best for kids I think sometimes Lee County is behind the eight ball if you will on teaching units where Auburn and Opelika have extra money they have the performing arts teachers they have music teachers art teachers and we struggle for that in Lee County and that's that is such a huge part of a child's education it's not just book sense it's it's all your extracurriculars that right now they can offer and we're very limited in what we offer and if I have anything that I could do if I if I had one wish I wish that we could put fine arts in the arts program k12 in Lee County coming from a guy that cannot play the radio without static I can't do it can't draw a line without a ruler but it skipped a generation my father played in Auburn band and my sisters can play anything that they pick up and one is a very talented artist and then I can't do anything but my oldest son can my youngest son plays musical instruments my oldest son's an artist it's like what happened here well you're the athlete the family and I say no I really wasn't both my sisters were really better athletes than me but it is an important part of a child's education and it's fun to watch them too to just get involved and give them that opportunity

Kyle: so being a superintendent for as long as you have been what are some challenges that superintendents face now because I have literally no idea and I'm sure not many people do

Dr. Mac: yeah I think we all are challenged with budget issues and trying to make the best out of least that we have and that's a that's an answer that you can always use

Kyle: it's a real answer

Dr. Mac: yeah I mean it's it's something you have to deal with but there's more to that obviously than just money in today's society and I mean you look at what just happened in Florida school safety there's not a day that I don't get up and the first thing I do is pray to God that nothing happens like that so school safety is always on the top of my thought process then you just have just the societal issues that we're going through that we didn't go through I mean I'll be 57 this year and we didn't deal with it you know we have more mental illness than we've ever had we've got more students with special needs than we ever had and you know it makes you wonder why you know what what have we done in society what is this world done to where these issues now we're having to deal with them it's that's tough because everybody deserves in public education go ahead you believe it or not it's free and it's for everybody and everybody deserves the best that we can give but there's there's got to be a fine line with you know how much disruption do you allow for the for the child that's not you know a disruption it's a balancing act and it's it's tough then you have the issues of like I said earlier surrounding yourself with the best possible people right and we all know that's not a secret you got great teachers and you got not so great teachers the principal that gave me my first job I'm gonna say this and y'all are gonna think I'm crazy but he said he said Mac I'm gonna tell you a secret about hiring good teachers and I said ok what's that I did just like you did I got up on the table and leaned in he said hiring a good teacher or a bad teacher is like getting head lice

Kyle: okay

Dr. Mac: I had the same look as y'all do! I said okay explain that to me said look he said when you're hiring a teacher you look at their resume you make phone calls you interview and then you hire the best teacher based on the information that you have sometimes it's a good teacher sometimes it's a bad teacher it's just like head lice you don't go out looking for head lice but sometimes you may get it it's not a disgrace to get them it's a disgrace to keep them just like teachers or employees of any kind I think everybody has the desire to be successful teaching is a calling just like preaching and just like just about any other profession it's a calling to do that some people have it some people don't and as educators if we want to make the difference in the classroom we've got to be willing to have that difficult conversation with with the ones that probably need to do something else and so you know trying to create that culture is totally different but you know something I've always remembered since that first first day it's a lot like getting head lice it's not a disgrace to get them it is a disgrace to keep them

Kyle: good teachers and bad teachers you have taught at every level so you have and then you've been a superintendent in two different states you know what are some things that you think good teachers are doing that other teachers are not or what are some things do you think that bad teachers are not doing

Dr. Mac: you know again I think a good teacher teaches children so many times you hear why what do you teach I teach math Oh what do you teach I teach science no you don't you teach children you know and or the my favorite is well I taught it they just didn't learn well if they didn't learn it you didn't teach it you know my wife had an uncle Charles God rest his soul he was a math teacher at Kennesaw State University and we had some great knockdown drag-outs cuz he would sit there and boast about I failed

you know 75% of my class I said then that means you're a failure Charles what do you mean I'm the captain in the Navy I flew jets if you fail 75 percent of the kids because you didn't teach them you failed as a teacher oh we would go back and forth on that but you know that's I kind of got off-track but you want someone that teaches children you want someone that's willing to think outside the box because of all the things I've said earlier that society is changing and the kids are changing there are not two kids the same and you may get it one way I may get another and you're gonna get it another way and a teacher has to be willing to accept that responsibility and be able to teach a lesson in various different ways and and then you you know when you check for accuracy I hate to use the word test but we test all the time but when you check for a child's understanding of knowledge if that child doesn't get it then you know reteach it in a different way and you've got to be willing to do that in order to make improvement to make a success so you know I don't know that it's a magic wand I think it's just a desire to to reach all children and do whatever it takes to do that and we've got a great technology program in Lee County and that's that's a tool to use and some teachers are very comfortable with that tool some teachers are not very comfortable and it's not the end-all be-all antidote it's just a tool so you've gotta be willing to to experiment to step outside that comfort zone and push yourself a little bit and it goes back to teaching keeping good teachers and I do believe everybody that goes into the teaching profession has the heart they want to but really when comes down to it not everybody can and that's not disgraceful it's just it's a it's a shame that they didn't catch it earlier and they've gone through all that all the you know college and university classes and you know it's just I'm here for children

Kyle: well and it is a profession from the heart like you have to have it in your soul

Dr. Mac: absolutely

Keith: so teachers have things like you you're talking earlier about teachers have issues to face that they haven't I mean they didn't face it when we were coming up they surely didn't face it when you were coming up and so so there are things that that teachers and yourself have to face these days stuff on social media you know and all of all of these kids their brains are still cooking so a poor decision is not out of the realm of possibility to have been made and so how do you and hopefully your teachers handle some of these things without permanently damaging that child's future prospects you know you know you try to make sure they learn from their mistake and hopefully never make it again and but still make sure that the rest of your student population is safe those are things that I know can't be easiest like just probably like juggling plates

Dr. Mac: yeah probably the hardest thing to do in education is to tell a child you're not welcome to come back the second hardest thing is telling the teacher but I've always approached it the same way as my parents raised me Mac you're gonna make decisions all your life you've got choices okay with every choice comes consequence sometimes a good consequence sometimes it's not so good consequence but you got to learn from those choices and those consequences and that's the way I raised my two boys the same way and and you try to let them make those decisions and if they you know make a bad one and you just get through it as a as a dad and a son and you know Mom and the son and as a family it's the same way in school I think you have always the way I discipline children that weren't mine is you know you have a choice every decision you make can be a good decision or a bad decision but you've got to understand you make a bad decision you got bad consequences coming to you and it's not going to change so you know you try to instill that but when you got parents that don't want to be a parent anymore they want to be a friend and it's automatically you're right as the child everybody else is wrong

you know I think we're doing a disservice to kids at that point in time I love my parents but boy I tell you what I wasn't about to make them upset cuz I knew the consequence I pushed the envelope every once in a while but I knew the consequence and it was not always a happy ending I think you just you have you know you have to make sure that the kids understand parents understand that we have rules to abide by and today in in society you have laws to abide by and if you don't if you break the rule break the law there are consequences and you know I don't as a father I don't not love my children because they made a bad decision we just got to get get through it and you know you hope to goodness that when they're grown that they understand those you know those things that you did and why you did them I try to teach I try to treat every child as that child was my own

Kyle: I feel like there's gonna be a time I have a seven-year-old there's gonna be a time when he and I are gonna be great friends right now my job is to raise someone who can be a productive member of society who can understand how the rules work and that there are consequences and so that's the approach that I've taken so I'm sure it's difficult for teachers who don't have families that are that involved oh we're gonna be buddies you know we're gonna be texting back and forth in the middle of school day and all this other stuff you know it's tough to have to be the bad guy

Dr. Mac: absolutely yeah it's you know parenting is not easy and don't get me wrong you can be the child's friend you know but but it's not it's not your primary goal and your primary goal is to make sure that child's safe nurtured and educated right and at a later date become a productive citizen of society and you know maybe when they turn 31 and 28 you can be a friend again I guarantee they they still say we know the boundaries dad but you just do the best you can and hope to goodness at the end of the day

Keith: now we've been talking about the challenges and I know that it's a thankless job but

Dr. Mac: no, it's not a thankless job it's you don't always see the end result as fast as you might like and I had a conversation last night with a parent group in Sanford and we were talking about yard work of all things and I said I love yard work I'm my own worst enemy when it came to yard work though because I had two boys that wanted to help but they couldn't do it the way I wanted it and they said you're just too hard to please dad and I said no and I think it comes from from being an educator because yeah every once in a while in a lesson you see that light bulb come on okay but to really see that the end result you have to watch that child grow for 12-13 years and graduate that's that's the ultimate in education is the graduation part where you cut the grass man it's tall one second and the next day next this straight line and everything's manicured and it's an instant gratification in that way you know right there right then and there but it's it's not a thankless job it's just sometimes takes a while to get thanked

Keith: there's some proverb about planting a tree that you'll never be able to sit in the shade of or something like that so I imagine that is kind of kind of one of your guiding principles kind of is you're planting that tree that you're not gonna get to sit in the shade of for the most part but what are what are some of the rewards and perks of the job

Dr. Mac: you know as a teacher I was a physical education teacher and science teacher and I didn't teach but three years so I didn't have the impact that a lot of you teachers at 27 years in the same school building would have but there was one little girl that was overweight second grader she way overweight and we just worked with her and by the time I left she understood nutrition she understood exercise and was able to shed some of that weight you know that was a success as teaching I think again as I said

the graduation is the end result one of the things we've done in Lee County that I'm very proud of is our LC2 program

Kyle: so tell us about that

Dr. Mac: okay LC2 Learning Center whatever you wanted to call it and it's an alternative school but but when people talk about alternative schools I think the first thing they think of and when I explained it out in public I said what's the first thing you think of when you hear alternative school well that's behavior and that's usually what it is but Dr. Cox and I envisioned in a school that was not a disciplinary school but an alternative to the brick-and-mortar school that you know 90% of us go through and enjoy we wanted to create a a setting for a child that either didn't like that brick-and-mortar school had family issues that they there was a reason why things weren't going well in a traditional high school be a little bit more open campus if you will come and go with some rules and guidelines but give them the ability to get get it done and get out with whatever they have to do in life the first year we opened up in October and I think we started with five students in that program and I was at graduation at one of schools and kid cut walked across the stage and he was one of the first ones there and I was beaming from ear to ear and after the graduation and the seniors down the moms and dads come up this lady was boohooing and the child said I told you mom I told you I was going to get there I told you and it just that child probably would not have graduated from the high school had he stayed in the traditional high school and you know today we've got 64-65 kids that have graduated from the LC2 that have gone on to work gone on to the military gone on to junior college that probably would have dropped out and not you know done what they wanted to do whether it's I have to go to work my mom and dad lost their job and I need to help the family or I've got a child to raise I need I've got that responsibility so you know we've created a environment that is inviting those kids and yeah to say we don't have discipline problems we have same problems out there but but they get one shot and they get one shot at it and if they don't if they don't make it there then they go back into their their high school so we don't

Kyle: attending the Learning Center is a benefit for them

Dr. Mac: absolutely it is that's their choice up to a certain point

Kyle: attending the Learning Center is a privilege

Dr. Mac: yeah and now we're partnering with Southern Union and their president came down the guy from the State Department came down and there head of vocation where we met down at the Learning Center and they're going to donate some milling equipment but when they were talking to the kids the kids knew what they were talking about I didn't know exactly what they're talking about but one of the kids says that's a money job and the guy from the state said what do you mean by that he said oh my family runs a mill in Columbus he said what you're talking about it's money job he said I want to know more about it because I'm about to graduate and I was going to work for the family business but if I can do this and you know they're talking about creating a program with LC2 students in southern Union to where at graduation you could walk out making \$60,000 now you tell me where you can walk out out of a high school and make \$60,000 I think when you continue to grow the program those are the types of programs that that you got look not every child is ready for a four-year college and you know I think one time that was a way the pendulum swung and you have to get four years and if you don't get four years you're never going to be successful well that's not true it's a different world

Keith: so what are some of the some of the improvements that you've made come from how you inherited the school system to the point you got it now

Dr. Mac: I refer back to the book good to great I think Lee County is a good school system we're not great yet but part of that book you've got to get the the right people on the bus and then you got to get them in the right seats and I think we've done a really good job of as we've had openings for leadership positions we've hired well when we've had openings for teaching positions we've hired really well and those people are buying into the philosophy of what it's going to take in order to turn good to great and so you know I think surrounding yourself with with people that are more knowledgeable about the subject than you are is the main thing and I'll be the first say I'm not a curriculum person I think I'm a people person I think I read people very well and I can get along with most anybody as long as they do what they're supposed to be doing and so I think we have done a really good job of getting the right people on board and in in the right places I tell this to Dr. Hunter and Dr. Wright and Mr. Fuller all the time we are on the verge of explosion and I really do believe that I think that we have put things into place in the classrooms to where you know we're going to start seeing kids take off with a learning environment we got behind in reading and it's not a surprise the entire nation is behind in reading if you don't know how to read you're not gonna be able to do much of anything and Dr. Hunter has done a great job in teaching teachers how to teach reading and it's it's there it's an art to do that and just because you have a degree doesn't mean that's you you know exactly what to do and so when I hired him I said your job is is to do this and he's taken it wholeheartedly and so you know I think we're I think we're moving in the right direction we're far from being great but I think we're better off than we were when I got here it's kind of like when you go camping and when you leave a campsite you want leave it better than you find it and I will never be satisfied never be satisfied just ask my kids but I want to be perfect and I know that's not realistic but if you're not if you don't have a desire to be the best then why are you doing it you know why are you doing it I want to make our children in Lee County the best that they can be and our kids are no different from the kid in Opelika or the kid in Auburn so there's no reason why we can't be the A+ school system we just got to get there

Kyle: one of the improvements that we've done at least since you've been here is the spark initiative can you tell us about that

Dr. Mac: when I first came in I think I talked with every director and assistant superintendent most everybody that I could talk with in the first couple of weeks and in talking with Glen I just wanted to kind of get a feel for where he was with technology and I was married to a technology director and that's what my wife did in Georgia before she retired so I always felt like I had inside information to what was going on in the technology world I'm not a technology person but I love Technology and so to hear Glen talk about his vision was interesting because knowing the background Glen was not an educator he was an engineer and he's got a different view of things which is very interesting on how he sees it and he has the ability to see the engineering side of technology and put it into play in the classroom so as we talked and we had very similar visions of what technology could do and where we thought it might be going we just decided we drew the line in the sand more or less and said you know we're going to do this we got to we got to do it just step up and let's do it so he got a group together to go to North Carolina the Charlotte area and we had a couple board members that go with us and we sold them on the technology initiative more of a one to one type initiative a computer to to child with that transformation we got into some more technology with the camera systems and the audio system in the classroom and the audio system has been a big hit camera system hadn't gotten to where I really wanted yet and I think

there's some hesitancy in teachers with the camera system and it is not Big Brother watching you that was never my intention at all I go back to you know I played sports all my life and from from the time I was in the seventh grade until I have graduated from college Friday night or Saturday afternoon what you did after that game is you watched film and you got graded what you did you did this right you blew it over here in this assignment and you tried to get better well if you use that same concept with a camera in the classroom as a teacher now they're probably not going to know how to sit down and dissect a class lesson but you teach them how to do that and you say what could you have done differently and did this really work for you or how did you like that that is my intention of the camera in the classroom is to be a teaching tool for the teacher to help that person become the best teacher that he or she can be without any evaluative consequence if you will if we can incorporate the camera into evaluation this is how it should work alright Kyle you need we're going to evaluate you three times just pick that out I'm on twice I'm gonna come in I'm gonna come in one with an announcement two with a surprise and your third one I'm gonna see on film as a teacher you can film your own lesson you can film as many times you want to you tell me as a teacher or anybody that you have an opportunity to film yourself and you go through that because now I've been taught how to go through it I know what to look for I'm gonna probably redo that a couple times and each time what's going to happen I'm going to be a better teacher you know so that's that's my thought process behind the camera along with safety I think today you can in today's society with the social media or anything instant if if a teacher is accused of something it goes on the news right or wrong guilty or not guilty it's on the news and after that fact it don't matter what you get guilty or innocent you're cooked so the camera systems run 24/7 in the classroom but they're only there for that purpose if something should happen in the class if the teacher gets accused of something or if a child does something and we have the ability to go back and look and free the the person of the individual the child or the teacher from that guilt or prove you know this is what happened then that's the way that should be used but my goal was to and is to create a better teacher in the classroom to use that camera for that so that's part of the SPARK initiative as well and we're grooming teachers and in the each school with the SPARK initiative that's a two-year rotation they get some great professional development and they get some of the toys and buzzers and whistles and it's proved to be a pretty good program the last two years so hoping to see it grow

Kyle: I've been the part of some of the spark training so let me tell you them teachers are fired up to be in there and any stuff they can turn around at the school seems to be really the teachers that are there are invested in it

Dr. Mac: yeah what's funny that in the SPARK initiative it was meant to be more technology obviously than anything else spark light a fire but what's come out of that if you go into the classrooms now you may not see and rarely do you see the old industrial way of doing things lines up here you've got learning stations scattered throughout the you know where kids are sitting on the hippity hop balls the recliner chairs and lights are dimmed or there's a music playing Beethoven or whatnot and and it is totally transformed classrooms just by letting teachers think outside the box and kids are more comfortable the teachers are more comfortable and when you've got that going on the classroom you're going to have teaching and learning going on the classroom

Kyle: so it's not about the devices some of the toys it's about the different ways that you can...

Dr. Mac: exactly the devices and toys are just tools and tools to help teachers be better teachers and they're good tools don't get me wrong I think there's going to be a time when textbooks are a thing of

the past you know you've got doctors now saying you can't have but so many pounds in a backpack for kids and you know you can't do that well that doesn't weigh a pound and you know you can get everything that you need right there on the phone and everything so

Keith: oh yeah because I remember I was like a Sherpa going through the with my bag

Kyle: well it sounds like when we were coming through the current Jr. high was the high school and so that's a pretty big campus so if you have a locker in building six and you had a classes in

Keith: I didn't use my locker

Kyle: right no I mean we didn't either

Keith: I just never used my locker because I had to go all over the place and I didn't have time to try go to with five minutes between classes building one to building six to the locker and then back to building three or whatever it was and of course I was taking calculus and the history and you know the thickest textbooks around so I tore a backpack or two before I got a good quality one so back in the fall we had a kerfuffle with some outcry about some things at a sporting event that should or shouldn't happen when stuff like that happens how do you how do you handle that how do you how do you address that address the concerns of all people involved

Dr. Mac: well we'll just go ahead and say there was an issue with prayer at the one of the ballgames whether I agree with it or not the law is the law and there's an interpretation of the law now it has been interpreted that the way we were doing it was okay that's the way a lot of administrators had been interpret and had been told by legal that it's okay to do that way the Supreme Court circuit court whatever made the judgment is no you can't do that you can't have a student come up to the microphone and lead the people in prayer that's not student-led prayer which it is but I have allowed the student the stage and you know and somebody called us on it whether or not I liked the decision I had to make was a moot point and that is probably the hardest thing for me to do is to go against my core belief my core value again right is right wrong is wrong and we have laws to abide by so that was the decision that was made it was not I never said you can't pray at a sporting event here's how you have to do it but boy you talk about being attacked and by people that they don't know me don't know my family just shy of death threats I mean very very very damning

Keith: how Christian of them

Dr. Mac: yeah exactly oh yeah exactly and that's and that's what I wanted to say and I wanted to respond so bad and just but just don't you know you have to you have to reach down and say I'm doing the right thing I'm not going to get this school system in a lawsuit over something like this there are ways that we can do what we want to do and nobody can say we can't do it that way and that's what the kids did you know it became okay not one person's praying now we've got 5,000 people praying so thank you very much you know but we'll have to face it again you know and we have I got the same people sent another letter saying that our choral Department is singing in churches and they and it's mandatory that they go on Sunday and they're listening to this no it's not and we did the investigation and I I love the way that letter came out you're wrong but but you're gonna have you're gonna have people shoot at you

Keith: yeah I think so how do you deal with that how do you how do you get past that so

Dr. Mac: I don't think you ever get past it I really don't I mean I don't a lot of people say that's gonna be your downfall Mac I don't forget much and I forgive even less and that's a very not a good quality of mine and and I'm working on that you know but that hurt kids the attacks I'm a grown man and you don't know me and I guarantee if you saw me you're not going to say it in my face but when you hurt a child that's unforgiven

Kyle: the outcry after that event happened from families and students and you know that's the area I live out there boy let me tell you I mean they and I don't mean the negative outcry I mean the we are not allowed to pray this way we're gonna pray a different way and it's gonna be loud and it's gonna be you know and so they took their rights and I just thought I was like wow you know that's really good

Dr. Mac: absolutely

Keith: you know when there's a will there's a way and as long as this within the law

Kyle: right

Keith: then you're good to go

Kyle: yeah absolutely one of the reasons that we're doing this is that we want an opportunity to tell our story because the only time we get put in the news is when things are terrible and so one of our one of our core beliefs and mission statement is being awesome and being awesome for students that go to our school being awesome for teachers and parents what are some awesome things that you've got to be a part of since you've been here at Lee County

Dr. Mac: there's so much here to offer people and you know I think I'm blessed by by being able to work with people like yourselves

Keith: aww

Dr. Mac: no no it's not sucking up to anybody

Keith: the check is in the mail

Dr. Mac: but seriously it goes back to one of my initial statements you surround yourself with good people and I inherited some great people and I think I've hired pretty well and to me it's it's you know relationships and when you have enough people on board thinking the same way you think and you're here for one reason and one reason only and that's to educate children great things are going to happen if I can ever get everybody in this system thinking the same way there's nothing we can't do it's just not fast enough sometimes

Keith: yeah I understand

Dr. Mac: thank y'all one of the first things I said that the leadership team was I'm here to make you the best that you can be and your school system the best and if it's if you want to try something let's try it and regardless of whether we did it thirty years ago or last week or yesterday if you think it can work let's try it if it's legal ethical and moral I'll support you 100% and that's that's the mindset that you have to create my first year as a superintendent in Commerce I had a teacher middle school teacher and God she called me for everything I mean it's just probably ten times a day can I do this can I do that I want to do this and it's like a half mile away from the office and I hung up and I said I'll be back in a little bit I

went down and sat down and said look and I called her by her name I said if I wanted to be the middle school principal I'd still be in Gainesville I said but I passed that 14 years ago you have been a principal for seven years you know what to do you don't have to ask my permission for everything if you want to try something let's try it if it doesn't work but you did it with good intentions that's okay let's learn from that mistake and how could we have made that work she started crying and I'm like oh God I didn't mean to do that so I go back and I start talking to the assistant superintendent who had been there for a while she said well you know in the past that's not been the philosophy of this the past administration and she got raked over the coals pretty good and I said well you know that's just I don't have the answers like I played football again all pretty much all my life I was not a great player but I played on a great team and so when

Kyle: some of the best teams I've been on have been led by and organized with the mindset of I'm not the smartest person in the room I don't have all the knowledge but that's the reason that we are here together because each person's gonna bring something different and as long as you said as long as their goals are the same you're gonna get some awesome results

Dr. Mac: absolutely

Keith: and those are the best collaboration environments that you're gonna have

Kyle: absolutely

Keith: as long as there's you don't have a prima donna that thinks they have all the answers

Dr. Mac: you have to set the guidelines you you have to you know everybody wants to know where the line is and you've got to have that it's just like the choices and consequences that we talked about earlier but you you know again goes back to moral ethical legal you think it's gonna work for kids let's try it let's give it a shot and we've done a lot in five years with that mindset and we've gone from the industrial rows of classroom setting to a classroom that it makes you smile when you walk in

Keith: it does

Dr. Mac: it's just you know five years ago I would never been that you'd never heard of that and teachers painting their walls a different color than the you know battleship gray or a bathroom yellow or whatever but it's inviting to the kids and then the kids are excited about being there it goes back when they thought about being there they're gonna learn

Keith: well Dr. Mac thank you very much for sitting down with us everybody listening be awesome and
Dr. Mac, War Eagle

Dr. Mac: hahaha, Go Dawgs

Ukulele Music