

1/19/18

Throughout the course of a week, I engage in meetings and activities which require leadership and participation. However, other times, I feel like my role is to observe, learn, and make sense of it. Whatever the situation, my intent this year has been to grow in my ability to be in the moment, and this week provided so many moments on which to focus.

Girls' Basketball got the week started by beating Valencia High School in a League match up. However, when the outcome of the game was no longer in suspense, I remembered what the victory would mean for our head coach Claire Gocke- career victory number 100. She did this in only 6 seasons, having taken over a struggling program. As the only female coach in the league, she developed a program that now competes each year for the top spot. The moment her team broke out a large sign congratulating her for the accomplishment seemed especially significant. The girls had obviously put some thought into the sign and the team picture behind it created a great "photo op". To make it even better, Coach Gocke's parents were able to attend all the way from the Chicago area!

Wednesday was quite an eventful day all to itself. At about 8:50 am, I moved to the front of the main office to greet visiting parents arriving for the District Tour Day. About 4 sets of parents joined us for the first session of the day. I enjoyed hearing about the interests of soon to be students and think of all the possibilities. It is important that students find courses or programs that fit them well, but I also know they will encounter an expanded world and important growth as Tillers. I remember those days as a parent, and it was fun to make a connection with these prospective parents. Tim Grave, an assistant principal, graciously offered to lead them on a tour because my attention was about to be diverted. I am grateful for our Tiller Team that often works seamlessly, sometimes because of incredible planning and preparation, and other times because people are attentive to pressing needs and more than willing to step in to help.

Shortly after visiting with prospective parents, I had the privilege of meeting a team of educators from Chino High School. They were primarily science teachers and interested in our implementation of NGSS. It was great to hear about their impressions and it reminded me of how hard our teachers have worked and how far along we are in the implementation process.

My visit with the Chino group ended in just a few minutes because I needed to meet yet another group of visitors at the back of the building. Just as I arrived at the gate, a string of cars rolled in looking like an official envoy. Not only did Marshall Tuck, candidate for State Superintendent of Schools, get out of a car, but one of his support team as well. There were also several leaders from the district office to join the visiting entourage, including our superintendent Dr. Franklin. Our visitors brought a great deal of energy to the visit, and they weren't disappointed as they moved into a Bio Med, T-Tech and Chemistry classroom. Our visitors were impressed with the collaboration, technology utilization, and the opportunity for students to engage in relevant learning.

The brief tour was followed by a quasi-meeting in the library stocked with parents, community members, educators and students. TUSD supplied the most of the participants, but we provided the students. At the conclusion of about a 15 minute talk from Marshall Tuck on how he would like the rest of the state to be like TUSD, there was another 15 minute block of Q and A. There were some thoughtful questions extended. None, however, were more impressive than Sabrina Thorn's (student) question asking for more specific feedback on what impressed him most about our school. As she asked her question, I couldn't help but think about the hours of classroom experiences that afforded her the opportunity to form such

a high level question in the moment. That question represented countless Socratic Seminars, structured conversations, and MUN assignments. When faced with a real life situation, she was prepared to deliver in the moment.

As the visit concluded, I was mindful of all the behind the scenes work that went into preparing for such a high profile visit. Whether it was Michele Boudreaux, assistant principal, organizing the parking, or Ali del Castillo, assistant principal, directing and moving our visitors; the whole day was a team effort. Sitting in the library observing the conversation with a high profile politician caused me to reflect on how special our school is on so many levels. One important dynamic that shown bright again on Wednesday is that we have so many team players.

As if the day wasn't full enough already, we had our monthly SEL Site Council Meeting just after school. On my way to the meeting, I happened by the Humanities building and saw several clusters of students engaged in a game that looked really familiar. It was a name game we learned in the summer at a Capturing Kids Hearts training, and right there out in the open was our girls' and boys' volleyball team fully invested in team building. The energy and connection among the players was obvious, and I was grateful as I walked by for coaches and teachers who take time to build our young people, not just as individuals, but as team players.

In our SEL (Social Emotional Learning) meeting, about 15 teachers from a variety of departments joined in to consider our SEL work to date. Then, we turned our attention to plans moving forward. Several surveys and opportunities for input later, Mr. Tyler Watkins and I (with help) have tried to synthesize all that has been expressed and to organize it into a document that makes sense. This has been a baseline year, and we feel like we at least have a structure and plan for the next couple of years. One of the activities in the meeting included a chance for teachers to type some strategies into a Google doc with which they felt comfortable. It was actually impactful to watch the document rapidly expand in a matter of a few minutes. It felt like a great visual for what happens when we determine to work collaboratively to grow our students.

When the SEL meeting concluded, it started to hit me what a full day it had been. I was tired- a good tired. I was about to head home when I remembered there was a wrestling match in the cafeteria. I saw the set-up (which is quite a unique venue for a wrestling match) and it piqued my interest. I had to check it out. Starting for me at about 5:30, the next 2 plus hours were fascinating. Both the girls' and boys' varsity teams were highlighted. Watching them warm up and prepare for the league match communicated strongly that these young people belonged to a family. Each "family member" was dressed alike in their colorful compression shirt and boxing style shorts. Athletes were encouraged and celebrated whether they won or lost.

There were many interesting moments throughout the matches, but two jumped out at me. The first surfaced as Manny Segura moved out on the mat to wrestle. Just as he approached the circle to attach his red ankle band, a man walked into the room from the back. Someone pointed out that it was Manny's father, a hard-working man who doesn't often have a chance to see his son wrestle. For this match, he managed to get away just in time, and he walked over to join his wife in taking in the moment. About half way through the match, I saw Mr. Segura take out his phone and video, I am assuming to hold on to that moment as long as possible. I don't know how hard it was for Mr. Segura to attend that match, but he was rewarded with a dramatic comeback victory which ended with a take down in the first overtime. You could see the pride dripping from the father's face as he contemplated the effort his just watched his son offer on the mat in front of family and friends.

The other moment that particularly caught my eye was the pregame preparation occurring on the chairs set up for the home team. All our girls were sitting, lined up against the glass wall intently listening. A young lady in regular clothes was addressing the girls obtaining their full attention. I don't know what she was saying, but it was obvious that these ladies were taking it all in. The young "coach" was actually Jackie Lopez, one of our wrestlers. She did not have a match that night because there was no one to wrestle at her level, but she took it upon herself to contribute anyway. It was really something to see how these girls and guys performed. I am even more grateful for what these young people are learning about leading, perseverance, and grit. Wrestling is a tough sport, and when done well, teaches so much. I am grateful for another one of our teams that works to build young people and team players!

On Thursday afternoon after observing several classes, I sat down to read our WASC Self-Study (for an accreditation visiting coming up in March). As I read through all the sections, I was reminded of how much we have in place and how remarkably focused we are despite all the distractions in education. It read like an itemized list of many of our successes and also a reminder of challenges to overcome. The biggest take away from reading the document was how blessed we are to have so many gifted and committed team members. Whether it is a classroom teacher delivering instruction and going out of their way to help a struggling student, a staff member who pulls a kid aside to remind them of their purpose here at school, or a night custodian who decides to creatively fold a tissue on the top of a tissue box, we have our fair share of passionate and compassionate educators. For that I am extremely grateful.

Parents, thank you for the most important role you play as a parent. Your engagement matters! We also appreciate those parents able to lead, serve, and support all of our extra-curricular activities. These are so important for our students as well.

Thank you, and Go Tillers!

Jon Tuin
Tustin High School Principal