

October 10, 2016

Schooling, particularly public education, is made perfect when there is a culture that is entirely focused on ensuring every student succeeds. This culture isn't driven by legislation, manuals, or playbooks. Instead, this type of culture is arrived at when a true partnership between the parents, students and the school system exist. Particularly, the individuals within the school system (administration, teachers, coaches, cafeteria, etc.) drive this culture by coming together to create a belief that everything is possible. This past week I saw two great examples of this transformational culture: Del Rio Middle School Athletics and Dr. Lonnie Green's Power Hour.

The immediate attention grabber as one drives by the DRMS campus at 8:00 AM is the multitude of students on the Tennis Courts. Coach Castellano and Coach Gee greeted me and proudly described how the Tennis Program has grown over the past few years. The program has grown so much that boy's tennis and girl's tennis have separate class periods. The girls were practicing on this day so Coach Castellano took a moment to celebrate their achievements. She indicated that although she is proud of the numbers (36 girls in the middle school program), she is even prouder of the commitment to academics – 99% passing rate amongst the girls this past grading period. Excellent job Ladies (Coaches and players)!!!

In the DRMS cafeteria I saw well over 200 boys (7th & 8th grade) eating breakfast. Their coaches explained that these young men start their day well before 7:00 AM and practice through their athletic period. Once practice is over, they are given the opportunity to eat breakfast before reporting to second period. I immediately thought about the wonderful partnership that is developing between the school and the parents. The parents make an effort to bring their students to school earlier than most; the coaches create for them some wonderful formative experiences, and the cafeteria feeds them a good breakfast before reporting to class.

I then circled through some classes and eventually made my way back to the cafeteria and found another group of students diligently working on assignments. This time it was the volleyball girls. Their coach explained that one day out of the week the volleyball teams takes a break from practice and dedicates practice time to academics. She went on to explain that "academics first" means ACADEMICS FIRST! It is no wonder that they too had an almost perfect passing rate.

In these type of awesome environments, I don't believe there is a reason why any student (and teacher for that matter) would not make every effort to ensure every class is passed. I am hopeful that we are beginning to see the first glimpses of the many success stories that are about to come our way.

Next, I traveled to Dr. Lonnie Green Elementary. I have told everyone, that in as many school districts as I have worked in, I have never seen an entire grade level cluster so dedicated to a common purpose. Sure, I have seen a great math lesson here and a great reading lesson there. But to see an entire cluster of teachers, all at once, engage and challenge their students to reach high levels of academic achievement is beyond impressive. At Dr. Lonnie Green Elementary I witnessed perfection!

The Principal, Mrs. Salas, explained that "Power Hour (known as LG 55) at Dr. Lonnie Green Elementary provides intense reading interventions for all students. Reading is vital in every aspect of life! Words spoken and written are building blocks of life." It did not matter if I walked into a GT teacher's class, a bilingual class, a remediation class, or an "on level" class. All of the teachers were highly prepared for instruction and had their students fully engaged. By the level of engagement, and visible commitment to a common goal, I surmised that none of the teachers were bothered if they were working with their neighboring teacher's students, students that perhaps didn't have a certain label, or their own students. Like I said, I witnessed perfection!

Although it was tough to top this past Tuesday morning's experience, we did have some memorable experiences worth noting. Probably, one of the nicest reoccurring experiences has to do with former Del Rio Wildcats visiting their old school and happily noting how glad they are that we were able to preserve their old building and convert it into the SPC. It is always nice to hear their stories. This past week we were visited by Mr. Hank Woodward and Mr. Arthur Glaze from the class of 1956. Although I enjoyed listening to their stories of youthfulness and mischief, I was incredibly impressed with how fondly they remembered some teachers, particularly their typing teacher, Ms. Mae Rowland, and their English teacher, Justice Skinner. Can you imagine? Fifty or Sixty years from today, your students will still remember what you said and how you made them feel. The power of the teacher is beyond incredible.

I also thoroughly enjoyed visiting and congratulating students and teachers at North Heights Elementary and SFMMS. These campuses had the highest attendance rates for the first six weeks. I am thankful for everyone's commitment to increasing our attendance rates. Let's see who claims the trophy for the highest attendance rates this second six weeks.

Finally, it wouldn't be public education if we didn't have students enjoying their athletics. Evening activities included middle school tennis, middle school volleyball, high school volleyball and a trip to Laredo to continue to witness 6A Football Dominance. Although I enjoy the competition and the wow moments, I mostly enjoy seeing student's participate in activities that put a smile on their face and further engage them in school.

To close this blog, I want thank all of the teachers who have unselfishly made it their priority to make the Power Hour/Power Block come to life in so many parts of our District. I am certain that our students will be made stronger readers and their independent learning skills will be increased as the years go by. I also want to thank everyone who has gone the extra mile to ensure that students stay eligible to participate in their activities and remain engaged in school. [Educators](#) are truly the strongest beacon of hope for a stronger democracy and a more peaceful [America](#).

“I never teach my pupils, I only provide the conditions in which they can learn.” – Albert Einstein