

SUPERINTENDENT'S REMARKS TO DISTRICT 108 LITERACY LEADERS

12-16-04

I hope you will bear with me as I read some prepared remarks to you today. I know it is not best to read when speaking, but I often prepare my statements in advance when I feel what I have to say is critical to the mission of our district. I am also hopeful that reading is an acceptable behavior given the focus of all in this room!

First, let me share some great news! Overall student achievement in District 108 is at an all-time high! This success is due to the climate and unwavering commitment of all employees to work as a team and to seek every opportunity to become a true learning community. This success has also been dependent on the adults taking an active role in learning and seeking opportunities to improve our skills. As I look back at the history of this journey in District 108, what recent research tells us, and where I feel we need to direct our energies, I am encouraged even more that we are on the right track! What I mean by this is that District 108 began a journey several years ago to develop in-house expertise that focused on key, strategic initiatives. These initiatives included but were not necessarily limited to school and classroom improvement efforts via the use of PDSA and Quality Tools. Since coming to the district, I have and will continue to work hard at moving the concepts of in-house experts, professional mentors, and leadership from all angles forward.

For me, this is where you play a vital role. I have worked behind the scenes with Dr. Worner, Mr. Bowen, Mr. Emery, and the entire administrative team to do our best to focus our energies and align key systems of support in a manner that I believe will lead to continued success. Research clearly demonstrates that the key to success hinges on a couple of factors. One, we need to focus on literacy; and two, we need to have job-embedded professional development that offers all teachers and support employees the opportunity to witness quality instruction, discuss successes and failures, and to know that there is a support team that focuses the work of the organization around strategic initiatives. In essence, we need leaders! Leaders at all levels – at the Board table, in central office, in the building, in the classrooms, and in key focus areas.

It is difficult to find professional articles or education conference brochures, which do not include some discussion of the need to focus on developing leaders at all levels in the organization. Thus, I am confident that we are on the right track when we focus our efforts on the Literacy Leader. By its very title, I feel we have hit the target of what we should work to improve.

In an effort to focus our professional development and strategic thinking efforts with the entire administrative team, I recently wrote and presented a memo to all Administrative Council members that provided a narrowing of our priorities into a single priority. I will leave copies of this memo for all to see and would be happy to explore the concepts discussed in this text further at a later date. In essence, my direction to the administrators is that we need to focus on “Instructional Leadership.” I defined this term as 1) literacy, 2) student performance, and 3) teacher performance. I have since worked with Cabinet to continue the development of key systems and employees in a manner that will move this priority forward.

It goes without saying that you understand the importance of literacy as it relates to success in all content areas. Rather than simply talking about this, I am driven to “walk the talk.” The signature at the end of many of my emails states that “You can choose to dream or you can dream and do something about it. I prefer that latter.” I ask that you prefer the latter, also. For those that have already begun this journey, I ask that you continue to provide literacy leadership at all levels and to work with district administrators and teachers to model, discuss, and share quality literacy practices. If you have been hesitant to buy into the Literacy Leader district-wide effort, I hope that my remarks today will motivate you to join our efforts to provide leadership in the area of literacy.

Frankly, you are the experts in the area of literacy. As such, the administrative team and I must employ you as these experts to provide leadership, mentoring, and modeling with teachers and students. This will sometimes take the form of working with small groups of students, working with small groups of teachers, working with individual students and/or teachers, and modeling whole-group instruction so that teachers can learn from you as the Literacy Leader. As I have stated to the administrative team, we know “what” should be done, I am now encouraging you to work with administrators, teachers, and students to define “how” it should be done.

Let me close by sharing something that I said at the Board meeting on Monday. After Chuck gave a presentation on the successes we are seeing as measured by the state’s testing system, I expressed a concern to the Board of Education that I am not sure we can maintain the current level of scores. While this may be a valid concern, I am going to do my very best to move our efforts forward and to make sure your expertise becomes institutional knowledge. I am also going to do my best to work with the entire District 108 team to provide all students an environment that is focused on the true factor of success – literacy! I am extremely excited about this journey as I know it is based on sound ideas that will make a difference for our students and employees. With that, I am more than happy to take questions and address any concerns you may have about any of my remarks or the direction of our efforts.



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To: Administrator Council Members
From: Don White, Superintendent
Subject: District Priorities
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As you may know, it has been and will continue to be my goal to facilitate and support the development of activities that align our systemic efforts. This includes, but is not limited to, our efforts to reflect on and improve administrator in-service opportunities that you feel are directly related and aligned with your work and district initiatives. With this, I wanted to share some information to help frame the work being done to develop quality, well-connected, and aligned principal in-service/topic activities.

- Data was collected last year that lead us (Cabinet) to believe that the process for selecting topics for the principal in-service/topic meetings needed to be improved.
- This discussion lead to asking a team of your colleagues to assist with the development of the focus topics and activities that better match the needs of all administrators in District 108.
- The team began their work but felt they were operating in a vacuum without knowing the district priorities as they relate to school leadership.
- Cabinet participated in an activity in response to a request from the planning team. After going through a global to specific to global discussion, Cabinet crafted that following statement to focus the efforts of the planning team:

All District 108 efforts should be grounded in our strategic goals and the 7 Components of a Quality School/District. These frameworks are the base on which Cabinet has and will continue to work when considering strategic, systemic initiatives. With this in mind, we determined one priority we labeled "Instructional Leadership." The term "Instructional Leadership" should be interpreted to include 1) literacy, 2) student performance, and 3) teacher performance.

Therefore, if asked what I would like to see framed as our priority and driving initiative for all administrative in-service in District 108, I would respond with "Instructional Leadership."