

PTA Meeting--Principal's Report April 2017--Dr. Carlos C. Grant

Professional Development

We are keeping the energy going towards learner-centered assessments. There are many teachers interested in moving their practice forward to stay aligned with current research around Standards Based Grading. This is the focus of several small groups that work each Friday afternoon during our Professional Learning time. Some teachers will be continuing this work over the summer. One particular opportunity will be at The 'Transforming Systems through Standards-Based Learning' summer conference is sponsored by Des Moines Public Schools and Drake University. DMPS has a story to tell in its courageous adventures into district-wide standards-referenced grading (SRG) learning and practices, within a large urban district. Drake has been sponsoring terrific workshops allowing hundreds of educators to come together to learn from renowned speakers operating in a workshop setting. This conference has an emphasis on secondary education, although there will be some elementary application. The breakouts are facilitated largely by DMPS teachers and leaders, as they lead learning over how the Des Moines schools have implemented standards-referenced learning, including grading and reporting, over a large district.

WHS Principal Interviews

The official interviews for the Principal position occurred Monday, April 10th from 7:30am-4:00pm. The extended application deadline resulted in a little over 20 applications. A rigorous screening process resulted in four candidates being invited for interviews. Four interview groups (students, staff, parents and community members, and District administrators) conducted the interviews. Finalist(s) will be named soon. Staff and community members will have an opportunity to meet the finalist(s) before the selection is made through evening open house forums. Dr. Buck plans to present a recommendation to the school board at the April 24 school board meeting.

4th Annual HBCU College Tour

48 students to include Cedar Rapids Schools (44), Linn Mar Schools (3), and Des Moines Schools (1) traveled to visit colleges in Missouri, Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas. I have included a link of some of the pictures and videos documenting their experiences. Thanks to Gear Up Iowa, CRCSD, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., Linn Mar School District, and a host of private donors for sponsoring the tour.

18 Washington Warriors

Freshmen—6

Sophomores—5

Juniors--6

Seniors--1 (Conditional acceptance to Philander-Smith University pending ACT results)

<https://goo.gl/photos/2wVuqm4Q5gcH9PAY9>

Bear to Warrior Mentoring

The mentorship program between McKinley Middle and Washington is on to the next phase. We are scheduled to have the first Mentor/Mentee meeting April 25th at 1pm at McKinley Middle. This program is looking to initially pair 41 current eighth graders with current 10th or 11th graders. We are planning to use the MVP curriculum to train our HS students using a similar model seen in Big Brothers Big Sisters. It is our hope to give incoming 9th graders a more robust experience of what it means to be a Warriors and high school student in general.

Mindfulness Best Practices

We know that building positive relationships is critically important in our quest to engage students in meaningful ways. I want to ensure we keep parents engaged and aware of the work we are doing around mindfulness. Teachers and staff have been moving towards mindfulness best practices to inform how we interact with students. Below are practices on how to respond to stress and the contagious nature of our emotions. Many of the points support the work already taking place in our building. Some of my key takeaways include:

- The importance of getting some distance: It is only natural for us to become frustrated with student behavior and often times we lose our cool. Students recognize this and it only causes them to mirror us and escalate further. This is a great opportunity for us to offer students a break to calm down and breathe or fill out a reflection form with our neighboring intervention room teacher. The heightened nature of both parties will make it nearly impossible for a productive conversation to take place. Rather, allow that student to calm down in a neighboring room and process with another adult who is less threatening in the eyes of the student at that time.
- Validate the student's feelings: We should never be dismissive of how students feel. Instead of telling a student to "calm down" or "relax", frame questions and statements with empathy and understanding. There are some great ideas for this in the articles. Along with this, be very conscious of our nonverbal and body language and the message they are sending to students. These can be just as important as what we are saying as we try to deescalate a situation. Rather than crossing our arms or having our hands on our waist, keep the body language open, calm and relaxed.
- Own our role in an interaction: We have little to no control on how students come to us. As we know, many of our students have experienced trauma and struggle to regulate their emotions. Instead of focusing on what we can't control (students), focus on what we can control (our actions and response). Student behavior takes time to change and will have ups and downs. However, the more reflective we can be in how our actions escalate or deescalate situations, the more successful we will be. Focusing on our actions will also help us feel empowered as educators, rather than feeling hopeless about students who struggle.

<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/contagious-emotions-responding-to-stress-lori-desautels>

Masters Facility Planning

I am urging all parents and students to join us in conversation surrounding our school facilities. The Facilities Master Planning process began last fall; a committee of parents, students, employees, business and industry leaders, and other community members has been meeting since that time to consider such factors as changes in teaching and learning, the age of schools, an ever-increasing pressure on funding to support facility needs and improvements, and the changing location of families within the community. You can hear Committee members share their thoughts about that process in this video as they prepare to gather feedback on their work from the community. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RfJrJgp118>.

Input sessions are scheduled for April 11, 12, and 13. The format and discussion will be similar on each evening and we invite you to choose the date the best fits your schedule.

COMMUNITY INPUT SESSIONS

Tuesday, April 11

6:00- 8:00 p.m.

Arthur Elementary School

2630 B. Avenue NE – Cedar Rapids

Wednesday, April 12

6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Van Buren Elementary School

2525 29th Street SW – Cedar Rapids

Thursday, April 13

6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Nixon Elementary School

200 Nixon Drive – Hiawatha

An online survey focused on this work will provide another opportunity to share your input. The survey be posted on the District website (www.cr.k12.ia.us) from April 18-28.

Additional information about the District’s Facilities Master Planning Process can be found at <http://www.cr.k12.ia.us/departments-services/reimagine-re-envision-and-reinvest/>