

LETTERS FROM THE PRINCIPAL:

INTRODUCTION

As a Principal, my biggest challenge is ensuring that the school carries out our ambitious community promise to “deliver a quality and equitable education to every student.” The following letters to my staff, written at the end of the week are reflections on how to meet that challenge on a daily basis.

Started as a way to close the week with ideas for the staff I serve, “Friday Final Thoughts” is a play on the ideas of finally Friday, final exams, and the thoughts I have had based on the things I have seen, heard, and experienced throughout a week of service as the principal. The end salutation, “Yours in Rebel pride,” illustrates the encouragement I hope to communicate to our staff through our team mascot, the Rebels. It also is my attempt to remind us that if we want our students to display pride we, ourselves, need to emulate pride.

Sent: Friday, August 14, 2009 3:09 PM
Friday [Final] Thoughts

Colleagues,

Just a quick note to say ‘thank you’ for all you have done to help our school year begin. I was very impressed with your upbeat spirit, your smiles, and your efforts to help not only our students but also each other.

Together we will move forward in a positive manner, building off of the energy of not only each other but also that of our students. I look forward to next week and remind you to have high expectations for our students come Monday. Provide them with the classroom rigor and relentless thoughtful accountability that they need to move themselves forward.

We all know that Monday will be the real test of our expectations and the hopes we have for ourselves, each other, and our students. Stick to your goals and stand by your policies and procedures. If each of us does this, we will send a very positive and direct message to our students.

Yours in Rebel Pride,
Dean

Dean M. Auriemma, NBCT
Principal

Sent: Friday, August 28, 2009 8:27 AM
Friday [Final] Thoughts

Colleagues,

The end of our first full week has taught me many lessons about our students, our parents, the district we work in as well as about you. I have enjoyed these lessons and look to them as opportunities to learn more, be challenged more and ultimately work with you to accomplish more. While we have many legitimate concerns about the things we need to do as well as the resources required to accomplish these tasks, one thing is for certain, we have and our students have what is most important: *you*.

While we may be navigating through our newly installed student management system, late buses, needed computers, and an “under construction” schedule/class roster we must remember that these things will be sorted out. What is most important is that as these things are being addressed by you, me, our administrators, I.T., etc., we can’t forget that our students have the most important tool they need found in *your* time, *your* preparation, *your* planning, and *your* attention.

Am I trying to glaze over the needs we have? Absolutely not. These needs temporarily cause us daily obstructions to our goals; however, these obstacles are secondary to the significance of your role among our students. Enjoy your place as an educator here at our school, enjoy your Friday but mostly, keep tight to your direction, sustain your expectations and support your students as well as each other as each of us stretches to meet our goals.

Yours in Rebel Pride,
Dean

Dean M. Auriemma, NBCT
Principal

Sent: Friday, September 04, 2009 4:20 PM

Friday [Final] Thoughts

Colleagues,

Whew! What a week! Somebody asked me if I liked my job and I said “yes” – they looked really surprised. I do like it. It is very challenging, but with challenge comes reward. It’s a lot like what *you* do as someone (teacher, secretary, custodian, etc) who serves students each day. This week, there were a lot of challenges. I am committed to helping us work toward the reward of our current and on-going challenges.

Is the Honeymoon Over?

I felt it this week. As I talked to students, asked how they were doing, etc. I did not get my usual “Great Mr. Auriemma” – rather I got “Well, ummm.” I think I even felt like that a couple of times this week. Did you? My point is, that is okay and it is normal. My advice is to stick with your goals, hopes, and ideas despite the day-to-day challenges we encounter. Keep asking more and more of your students in both academics and behavior. Let us paint the mood, not our students. Let us determine the day-to-day. Our students are kids and they do “kid” things. We need to stick to our plan, our lessons, and most important our high expectations for each of them.

Hey, It's Friday. Wear Your Colors!

Have fun, find your Red and Gray and show it off next Friday [and every Friday]. We know we want our kids to be excited about our work with them. We know we want our students to be excited about our classes. Let's show our excitement through our pride as Rebels. Wear your colors and encourage your students to do the same.

Yours in Rebel Pride,

Dean

Dean M. Auriemma, NBCT
Principal

Sent: Friday, September 11, 2009 4:29 PM

Friday [FINAL] Thoughts

Colleagues,

Even with the serious student discipline events of Tuesday and our heightened awareness today, there is much we can gain from these experiences which will make us stronger, more focused and more effective.

How is this possible? Not only is it possible, it is a necessity.

Possibility can spring from all events that fall upon us. We see this everyday in our thoughtful interactions with our students as well as with each other. The function of possibility enacts itself when we choose to initiate its energy not in the direction it pushes us but rather, the direction we determine we want it to go.

Why is this necessary? Choosing possibility allows us to not only acknowledge the event as a learning experience but helps us move forward and beyond events that, while we may not always be able to control, we certainly can utilize to influence future events. What other choice do we have? On this day, of all days (9/11/09), we remember an event that shook us all beyond our imagination. On that day, we chose to move ourselves forward, celebrate the unity we shared, and proclaim our commitment to staying our course.

What does this have to do with us? In my reflection, these events are events that we did not ask for yet still need to address. Addressing them presents us with the opportunity to shine or to wither. In my observations, we did indeed shine. Due to the collective teamwork, established relationships, and determination to move forward we greeted our students, nurtured them through another week of high school, and offered them the best we had to give.

As I have said from the beginning of my relationship with this high school, our limitation will not come in the form of what we have to work with but rather, what we choose to do with the resources we have in our students, our community and each other. We will be as good as we chose to be. This week, we were very good. Now our focus must be in our relentless pursuit of engaged teaching and learning. Nothing less – despite what may come our way, this is our possibility and this is our necessity.

Yours in Rebel Pride,

Dean

Dean M. Auriemma, NBCT
Principal

Subject: Friday [FINAL] Thoughts

Colleagues,

School Improvement Plan

Congratulations to all of you for all you did to provide a spirited and enjoyable Homecoming week. Imagine what we could accomplish if we found a way to provide the same amount of school community spirit and focus to the School Improvement Plan educational objectives I shared with you during our professional development time this past week. We can, if we choose, accomplish what we collectively set our minds to.

While our School Improvement Plan is something we have to do, I hope to help us find the opportunity within the requirement. Ultimately, the framework this plan provides will lead us toward strategies that we *want* to do instead of initiatives we feel we are being *made* to do. Working in partnership with your Instructional Coaches, efforts to complete this plan will provide us many opportunities to talk with each other to share our creativeness and professional expertise. While we may add some new things to what we are currently doing in our work with students [and their families], my hope is that we will be more focused, more informed and more targeted in what we are currently doing.

I enjoyed spending time talking with you in a smaller setting, and I look forward to creating more opportunities like this.

Parent Partnership

While I have been here only a short time I have heard and seen many sides regarding the involvement of our parents. Regardless of what we wish or think parents should do, we still need to play our part in extending an invitation to them in joining us in partnership for the benefit of their student. I encourage you to continue to do the things many staff already do: call home, send emails or even send invitations home with your students inviting their parents to attend our October Parent/Teacher Conferences as well as enroll in our teacher and parent communications' tool.

For staff in their first year(s) here at our school, a simple tip to help ease the jitters of that parent that you worry may come to conferences upset is to call them now and get the first conversation out of the way. This way, when and if you do meet, perhaps the conversation can focus on the needs of the student vs. the feelings of the parent. Another simple tool, have parents sign in and leave their contact information. You may find that the contact information they leave is different than the information you have. To make a really big impression, follow-up the evening with a thank you letter or note home to the parent for their attendance.

I think you will find that doing some simple work during the next couple of weeks through contacting parents will help you make your evening with parents very productive.

Have a great weekend and thank you again for all of your work this week.

Yours in Rebel Pride,

Dean

Dean M. Auriemma, NBCT
Principal

Sent: October 23, 2009 2:45 PM

Friday [Final] Thoughts

Colleagues,

I have enjoyed the first 12 weeks with you and, while I have been presented with many challenges, I am pleased with the time I have had to spend with you, our students, and our community. As I continue to write these I hope that you come to appreciate them as both invitations to grow, develop, and become a highly effective educator, as well as to learn more about my expectations as your Principal -- expectations I have for each of you as well as for myself. I present two ideas to you on this Friday afternoon:

Signing the Signature Line for Our Diplomas

This week something very cool came across my desk -- the signature form for me to sign in order for my name to be listed as Principal on each student's diploma. This is the first time I have had the privilege of signing something like

this, and the enormity of the situation was, admittedly, a bit overwhelming. If we think of the high school diploma as both the culmination of 12 years of labor and love, as well as a sort of symbolic key to our students' future (and the future of their future family), the value of our diploma becomes extremely important. If we held each of our student's diplomas up to the sun, would they be richly opaque with rigorous academic experiences, athletic challenge, artistic endeavor and/or social maturity? Or, if we held certain diplomas to the sun, would we notice a range of diplomas that displayed to us a range from opaque, translucent and even, tragically, transparent? I am sure this is a universal question that every quality American high school asks itself and one, that as your Principal (and theirs), that I certainly ask myself. It is a question that you can count on me to ask each of you, no matter what your role.

Are we Asking Enough of our Students?

The above prompts me to ask this question next. Are we satisfied with what our students are doing for us, or, are we wishing for more? Whatever the response, I can promise you that only you, the Teacher -- the single most imperative factor connected to a child's success or failure, holds the answer to this question: Are we asking enough of our students? Are we expecting them to exceed or are we happy if they just comply and behave? Do we have higher than expected intentions for their learning to learn skills, for their academic attitude, their dress, their language, their choices as they relate to our classrooms (clubs, teams, etc), the way they treat each other (us and themselves?), their goals, participation and execution of assigned tasks? If I have been able to earn your trust and respect through anything I have done this year, I hope that that trust and respect is enough for you to believe me when I say that we will not enjoy the collective luxuries of being a successful teaching and learning organization until each one of us pushes ourselves to first push our students, and second, support them as we push them. Our students, like it or not, are semi-reflections of us, the leaders, the adults -- the professionals.

I hope this note finds you well, and I thank you for all you do each day.

Yours in Rebel Pride,

Dean

Dean M. Auriemma, NBCT
Principal

Friday [Final] Thoughts

Colleagues,

First I want to say "thank you" for your feedback on the 6 Illinois Professional Leadership Standards that I gave out and asked you to evaluate me on. I will do a summary of the data as well as add some reflections to share with you

sometime soon. I appreciate your input.

Congratulations

I hope that you left Parent & Teacher conferences with as much hope and optimism as I did. I was encouraged by the number of family members that came to see you and speak with you about their student. Thank you for your time given and commitment to high-expectation conversations with our families. If you feel that you made good contacts or collected good contact information, please utilize that information to your advantage. I have been pleasantly surprised by the amount of gratitude parents have displayed with simple acts of follow-through, follow-up, and/or service to their child.

In Closing

Now that I have been on campus for at least 8 weeks I have come to what I think is a very important conclusion. While I had fun with my "Welcome to our school" play on words and hope that you saw me wanting to encourage you to define yourselves through the things you chose and not the things that were put upon you. My two month observations of us-in-action have taught me that we no longer need to spend energy complaining about things that are out of our control (the travel budget for example). These items, while very important items to us, become distractions from our asking and answering two very important questions:

What kind of teacher am I? and, Do I know how to teach these students?

Hopefully you understand by now that even though I say teacher, I really mean anyone who is reading this. To the students, every adult is a teacher. How we act, what we say, how we dress, all communicate to our students messages that contribute to their education and, through them, our potential success as a teaching and learning organization. Why am I presenting these two questions? Because no matter how successful you are as an education professional or how "work-in-progress" you are, we each need to ask ourselves these two questions.

What kind of teacher am I really asks: Am I a good teacher? Am I effective? Are my students successful? Do I have the respect of my colleagues? Do I have the respect of my students? Do I feel successful?

Do I know how to teach these students really asks: Do I know my students? Do I know what their limits are? Do I know the possibilities of my students? Do I know what learning to prescribe to my students? Do I communicate with my students in a thoughtful manner that elevates them as human beings and, thus, builds their capacity to receive the information I am providing? Do I understand the circumstances of my students and harness the positive and push through the negative? Do I build confidence in my students?

Go back to the "Welcome to our school" message I was trying to send at our last

faculty meeting -- each of us addressing these two questions will establish us being in control of our own welcome message.

Yours in Rebel Pride,

Dean

Dean M. Auriemma, NBCT
Principal

Sent: Wednesday, November 25, 2009 4:29 PM

Friday [Final] Thoughts

Colleagues,

This is a challenging time of year for us as educators. We can feel this because each one of us (and our students) look/s forward to time with family outside of school. Admittedly, school (and all that comes with it) may be the last thing on our mind as we look forward to a much needed (and even more deserved) break.

My advice, jump head first into the pool of life outside of our school. Sound opposite of what I might usually say? Well, I guess I am buying into that absence makes the heart grow fonder idea. Time away can give us distance that creates much needed perspective, focus and energy.

My only caution? Come back with a rigor vengeance. Why? Because the time between now and our winter break will bring much distraction within our students. You have spent many a classroom hour teaching them procedure, enforcing policy and basically training them to be the students you need them to be for you to feel like you are actually teaching more than managing.

Don't lose hold of this grip.

The time after winter break and into spring break is the most important learning time our students will have with us. Whether you teach a year-long class or a semester class, this time is the period where our students need to begin seriously applying the habits of heart and mind that we have been [collectively as a school] teaching them since August. As the holidays pass and the weather becomes nicer, our students will try harder and harder to put us aside. The only thing that will keep them moving in a direction we/they need for our/their own good is the thoughtful rigor you present to them each day. For this, they should be thankful for you.

I hope this upcoming break finds you with opportunity to refresh, refocus and renew.

With thanks,

Dean

Dean M. Auriemma, NBCT
Principal

From: Auriemma, Dean M.
Sent: Thursday, December 17, 2009 10:36 AM
Subject: Friday Final Thoughts (Semester End)

Friday [Final] Thoughts

Colleagues,

I hope that you have taken time to reflect on the hard work you have done this semester on behalf of our students, our school and our community. With the close of the semester it is important for you to take time to not only applaud your accomplishments but also reflect on the initiatives that you wish to engage in during the 2nd semester. I hope that this upcoming break offers you a time to renew, refresh, and refocus.

Second semester is a great time to install new procedures with your students. Do not be afraid to keep the great stuff, throw-away whatever did not work and re-invent or create new procedures that will help your second semester start strong, stay strong (especially in the spring) and finish strong.

While I feel that we still have many things to accomplish here at South, I am very pleased with the progress we have made so far.

As we look to the second semester, there are 4 key initiatives that I want you to be aware of:

1. **School Improvement Plan:** I will begin to work aggressively with our building leadership (Administrators and Instructional Coaches) to implement the action plan portions of our school improvement plan. While many of us have been working on parts of school improvement, it will be important for us to prioritize initiatives, map-out time lines, identify resources and determine dates of completion. Key to part of this plan is the work I will be doing with a newly reorganized Parent Principal's Advisory Committee as well as a newly created Student Principal's Advisory Committee.
2. **Rachel's Challenge:** In addition to Rachel's Challenge being tied to our School Improvement Plan, the ideas behind this program will be implemented throughout the remainder of the year as well as into the start of next year. I see January 13th as a very large challenge for us as a staff. The essential question will be: Are we able, as a staff in solidarity, to communicate a clear message and expectation to our students as it relates to the ideas surrounding Rachel's Challenge? The impact this program has on our climate will not be determined by our students but rather, by us as adults. If anyone is interested in helping with this initiative, please contact Miss B. or Miss S.

3. **Welcome to Our School, A Place Where Rebel Pride Lives:** Our students and you have voted, and we have determined that Rebel Pride lives here. So now what? You will see students involved in creating opportunities for both students and staff to participate in supporting as well as sustaining this idea. Remember, this challenge was given to our school community by me in both response to some of the sarcasm used to describe our school as well as in reaction to the community perception of our teaching and learning community. Our defining ourselves is an important first step. Together, we now need to live (and lead) by our self-selected definition and determine what pride looks like, acts like, talks like, learns like and teaches like. If anyone is interested in helping me with this initiative, please contact me.

4. **Code Red:** New this year, this opportunity allows students and staff to show and behave in a way that illustrates their Rebel Pride. We will continue to work to promote this opportunity as well as create new venues for students and staff to show their spirit. In addition, we will also create opportunities for our staff (and their families) to celebrate their Rebel Pride together. If anyone is interested in helping with this initiative, please contact me Mr. B.

I encourage you to complete your own to-do list for the 2nd semester, and I wish the best for you at the close of this year, the celebration of the season as well as for the opening of next year.

Yours in Rebel Pride,
Dean

Dean M. Auriemma, NBCT
Principal