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There is little that is more intimidating than walking out on a mat to face a wrestling opponent in front of hundreds of people, most of which know you and are waiting to see how you will fair. I know that feeling well having wrestled from 6th grade until my first year in college. Forget about cutting weight, intense practices, and the over-all grind of this grueling sport- It is that moment when you know all eyes in the gym are focused on you and your opponent: a foe who is intent on making sure they prevail at your expense. Those moments of anticipation before the match are sickening and require constant self-talk before even showing up in the circle for the referee to blow the whistle to start the match.

Last night, I watched my first “Night of the Tiller” event which was a wrestling fundraiser showcasing our Tiller wrestlers. To my surprise, the stands of the small gym were full of family, friends, and teachers of wrestlers. People were there to watch their “babies” wrestle, for some it was the first time ever. There was a great deal of anticipation as the evening began. Boys and girls alike competed on three mats throughout most of the evening. During the last phase of the program, one mat took center stage. The stakes were high: on the line was status, peer perception, and self-image. The weight of so much seemed to rest on each bout, and I was so proud of how our young people competed. Some matches were extremely close and other were quick decisions, but I know how much fortitude was required to show up on that mat to compete. It was inspiring. For me, watching girls compete as a team against other girls was a first. It was impressive to see these young ladies battle. By the end of the evening, some of the better wrestlers competed and it was even more impressive to see the obvious skill level exhibited. These girls and guys have put in a great deal of effort to grow their skills and it showed. It was a fun night for me to see the Tiller family coming together to celebrate our young people and their hard work.

Interestingly, the focus for me this week was on collective teacher efficacy. It is so important to build student self-efficacy. Last night reminded me of how important an instrument like wrestling can be to that end. However, what we learned this Monday in our leadership meeting with iCoaches is that the most important factor in developing student self-efficacy is our collective efficacy. It caused me to ask a lot of probing questions of myself. Do we collectively believe that we can grow our students, regardless of their background or situation in life? What have I done to support teachers to that end? What systems or structures are in place to support our collective teacher efficacy? Is our collective teacher efficacy on the rise, or are we just drifting, hoping that our students will grow? These were challenging questions for me. I think there are some things I do with the intent on growing collective teacher efficacy (My Friday Reflections would be a good example). However, I see so much room for growth. The research data revealed on Monday afternoon pointed to the impact of collective teacher efficacy on growing student self-efficacy.

My commitment level rose a couple of notches this week to make sure we find a way to make that happen. The truth is that we CAN do this; grow our students. How we teach and lead matters. I see classrooms every day and not all lessons are equal. Some moments are extremely productive and lead to obvious growth. Other times the focus is not there, and while activity is occurring on the part of the teacher, not much growth is evident. It is not about good teachers and bad teachers- It is about learning, growing and committing to growth. The teachers who seem to be getting the most out of their students are also the teachers who show a passion for learning, reflecting, and finding a way to make it happen despite the challenges students bring. Collective teacher efficacy is when we believe as a team that we can grow our students.

The good news about Roland Jones’s presentation on Monday was that there are ways to grow collective teacher efficacy. One of the most important is how I lead and communicate my belief in teachers. Again,

this week, I contemplated long and hard about how I do that and how I can grow. Like you, I do some things well and then there are other areas where I need to grow. But at the end of the day, I believe we can do this. We have talented people, but more importantly, we have people who passionately care more about their students and their growth. I see the sacrifice on a daily basis. It isn't a frivolous investment. You give like you do because you believe it makes a difference for your students. Thank you! I am looking forward to Thanksgiving break and then coming back to end the semester strong. I am hopeful we can come back to dig in and collectively find ways to grow our collective teacher efficacy so that we can significantly impact our students' self-efficacy.

As I was contemplating self-efficacy this week, I couldn't help but notice students preparing for the MUN Conference we are hosting this week at Tustin High School. For those of you who don't know, well over 1,000 students will be on our campus this weekend from about 30 schools. What is most impressive is that we do not hire an outside company to manage this event. We do not have many teachers or parent volunteers to lead this endeavor; this event is run by our students. I watched our students prepare, plan, and problem-solve throughout the week. I know we teach students many important skills from all our disciplines, however, I can't imagine a more important skill for our young people than learning to organize, manage, and lead an event like this. I know this will go on their resume, but I wonder how many prospective colleges or employers have any idea the magnitude of what our students will pull off this weekend. The over-all tone of the students with whom I spoke was "we can do this". They have that attitude because of adult believers and a track record of Tiller excellence. They have watched their peers do it over the years and so they believe they can do it to. That is the awesome thing about success: It breeds more efficacy. How do we build more successful experiences for our teachers, students, and staff? This is another question for us to continue to ponder but I am grateful for how MUN answered that question this week.

Speaking of thankful, as I enter this Thanksgiving, I do so with an extra dose of gratitude. For starters, I am grateful to live in a country where I can openly express to whom I am truly thankful because I have so much for which to be thankful. I am blessed with an adventurous wife who is willing to completely uproot and move to Southern California having lived her whole life in the Midwest (We did live in Berlin, Germany for three years, but that only supports my adventurous argument☺). I am also blessed with three children and a daughter-in-law who each care passionately about doing life well (Not perfect, but well!). And this year, I am extremely blessed to be part of the Tiller community. My heart is full this morning as I contemplate the privilege of being part of a team of people who want our school to do well. We have people committed to growing our students and each other, and I know that I have grown as a result. Thank you. I hope that all of you are able to have a blessed and relaxing break. We have a lot of ground to cover before the end of the semester, but it will be good to take some time off.

Don't forget the gratitude part! It is the reason for the season and I think a grateful heart is a content heart. Regardless of the challenges you may be facing this next week, I hope that you are able to find some time to be quietly thankful!

Be blessed and Go Tillers!

Jon