

Friday Reflection

10/26/2018

In most parts of the country, the turning leaves and dropping temperatures signal that winter is not far away on the calendar. However, for me, I prefer to rely on the athletic calendar as the signal for a change in seasons. Golf, Tennis, Boys' Water Polo, Cross-Country, and Football are getting close to wrapping up, and that also means high stakes competition to which our Tillers have responded well.

Consider the following:

Girls' Golf – Chloe Carraway played in her fourth CIF 1st round competition this week, which means that she has qualified every year of high school. Even better, she qualified this time for her first 2nd round CIF competition that will culminate an incredible high school career. (That is, unless she qualifies for State!)

Girls' Tennis – The team finished fourth in the Empire League this year which meant an invite to the final league tournament. This is the first time for the team in a long time, and Anaka Mahesh will play today to determine whether she goes to CIF next week. Tara Sadighi might have been in a similar situation but had to play Anaka in the quarter finals. Angelica Pelcastre and Tana Sadighi played extremely well in the tournament but lost their bid to extend their season by a slim margin.

Boys' Water Polo – For those who do not know, our boys' water polo team has been ranked among the top in their CIF division. However, the only problem was they had to finish with an above .500 record and place in league. Because they faced several challenging teams this year, their invite to CIF was in doubt. That was until this past week when they pulled out an incredibly hard-fought game at Cypress High School finishing with 14 points- just one more than their opponent. This week, they won some additional games with an exclamation point, winning 27-7 at their senior celebration game. Now, there is a chance that not only will we go to CIF, but we might also possibly host the first-round game! It is a testament to a hard-working group of seniors who are focused and determined.

Boys' and Girls' Cross-Country – Tuesday afternoon was the Empire League final and Tustin was well represented. The boys' frosh/soph team actually won the league meet. Our fastest female varsity runner, Natalie Murrieta, finished 23rd over-all. The fastest male runner, Jose Munguia, finished 3rd over-all and earned an invitation to CIF.

Football – Despite some adversity, including injuries and some difficult transitions, the football team has continued to battle. They have won their home games and lost their away games; now they find themselves on the edge of qualifying for CIF. Winning tonight will mean there is a chance they qualify. The good news is that it is a home game!

While it was big week for athletics, it was also an important week for teaching and learning. Although many indicators exist which suggest a vast majority of our Tustin High School students are learning and preparing well for life after high school, our team is committed to growing our practice in order to maximize student learning. In my 35 total years of education, my experience is that often times teachers are working much harder than the students. One of the things I have come to appreciate about Tustin High School is the commitment of teachers to balance that dynamic so that students are working equally hard. The reason for this is that when students are actively engaged in the work, they learn so much more. This past week brought several professional development opportunities that supported teachers in their shift to engage all students to maximize their learning. As I look back on it, it was an important week.

Instructional Rounds is a new initiative this year. We are encouraging teachers to work in groups of three to collaboratively plan and observe each other's lessons and then debrief. The focus is on implementing what we refer to as 'collaborative structures'. This is when teachers set up an activity so that students are working in groups with assigned roles and with a distinct purpose. Also, the structure of the activity ensures that every student is contributing to the thinking and communicating. This provides for even the most passive student to engage in the learning. The importance of last week and this week was that our first two rounds occurred. Three math teachers put their feet in the water first (Ms. Albright, Ms. Siteman and Ms. Chavez), and I watched their students engage in collaborative productive struggle. It was so exciting to observe the level of thinking occurring and the expansive participation. After the lesson, the teachers met and talked about what they learned after observing students. This week, three more teachers stepped up to the challenge (Mr. Maldonado, Ms. Vandal, and, first year teacher, Ms. Lee), and I observed similar dynamics among their students. As a result of this process which was led by our Connect Coaches Ms. Herrera-Olmedo and Ms. Larsen, I could see that we learned. I learned.

Another significant step we took this week as a team was the implementation of our first round of JOT (Just One Thing) sessions. During late start, we offered workshops for several different topics to support our growth towards engaging students. We are blessed with an outstanding team of teachers and admin leaders who are committed to growing and learning. Ms. Lane and Mr. Jones are two additional Connect Coaches who have been the backbone of professional development in recent years, and they played a key role in our school offering such quality workshops for our teachers this week. There are many districts who don't have the professional development layers and structures in place that we have as a school. We are truly blessed to have such a dynamic team. I just want you as a parent to know that your children are with some amazing people throughout the day. Whether it is the teacher instructing in the classroom, a counselor providing emotional and/or academic coaching, an admin intervening and looking out for what is best for your child, or a classified staff member making sure your child's day is safe, orderly, and efficient, I have never worked with such an outstanding team of adults.

On top of these important professional development experiences happening for teachers this week, I also made my way into over 30 classrooms. So far this year, I have visited 219 classrooms. I believe these visits are important on so many levels. Besides providing a way for me to offer feedback to individual teachers, I also think they are important for me to understand our teachers

and students, and what they experience. A side benefit is that I get to know your children and watch them perform in the classroom. It is amazing how when I make multiple visits throughout the day, I start to see students multiple times. Not only does it help with learning some names, but it also helps me see your children in a variety of contexts. I often say that we have some amazing young people, and I am reminded of that when I visit classrooms. I realize that our students face all kinds of challenges and struggles with a variety of issues, but when I observe them throughout the day, I am impressed with their resiliency and desire to be a good student and person.

Related to challenges and overcoming, we held one of our Challenge Success meetings this week. This is a group of teachers, admin, counselor, parent, and students focused on looking at the challenges and “stressors” our students face. The goal is to address at least one big issue and work collaboratively to change or improve the dynamics. During our meeting this week, we identified Tutorial period as something we want to visit, study, and develop a more impactful model. How can we run our tutorial so that more students are engaged and better supported, academically and emotionally? We looked at data from a student survey that showed our school is in a uniquely positive place, and students are also in need of additional support- both academic and emotional. Our tutorial is a potentially powerful tool that could use some tweaking. Over the next few months, the Challenge Success Team will dig in and learn more about current tutorial dynamics and start to look at possible tweaks. This is going to require input from everyone and I am grateful for this team of people who are passionate about supporting our school with this effort.

In all the activity this week, the SADD club also sponsored Red Ribbon Week. I always appreciate those students and teachers who are passionate about championing the cause to eliminate drug and alcohol use. This is a great reminder that this continues to be an issue in our culture, and I am grateful for those who are willing to take this on.

Finally, one of my highlights this week occurred on the Plaza stage. We are in some interesting political times and sometimes it is easy to lose site of the point of our democracy: the voice of the informed. This week, our freshman ASB candidates offered their speeches at lunch time in front of students and adults who gathered to listen. I was so proud of these students for articulating such thoughtful and authentic words. It was obvious that we have a number of candidates who really want to serve others through these student leadership positions. It caused me to think as I listened – It is great to be a Tiller!

Go Tillers!

Dr. Jon Tuin

Tustin High School Principal