

## Friday Reflection

11/16/2018

We started our year just a little over 3 months ago in mid-August. The calendar didn't bring many days off, and our students and staff invested fully in both academic preparation and extra-curricular activity. It has been a good year so far, and now it is time to take a bit of a pause for Thanksgiving. I think everyone is ready for break, but not before we showcase our annual MUN conference this weekend.

Sometimes weeks before a break have a winding down feel, but this week did not feel or appear that way from my perspective. As I visited classrooms, I actually felt an increased sense of urgency as various classes seemed to be gearing up for one activity or another. There was the choir class that was practicing a newer song for an upcoming concert. There was the jazz band fine tuning a piece for an approaching performance. There was the English class that was celebrating yesterday and today by showing their social commentary videos created as a result of an involved process. There were Math classes preparing for end of unit assessments.

Of all the classes I observed, none shared the level of urgency I observed in a first period MUN class as students completed final preparations for this weekend's conference. About 1,500 students from about 30 high schools will descend upon our campus tomorrow to engage in discussing global problems in order to develop resolutions that would address some of these challenging issues. The students run the conference and I could really see that in this classroom. Students came to student leaders to problem-solve logistical and tactical issues surfacing this week. A large group of students were evaluating research papers submitted by participants in order to determine the very best pieces. As students read the proposals, they circled back to a set of rubrics to assign scores as objectively as possible. While no one was panicking, the activity level demonstrated both urgency and professionalism. The Tustin MUN conference is impressive because students are engaging in conversations and trying to solve large problems with empathy for diverse cultures. However, it is even more impressive for me to watch our students run the event which is kind of like running a non-profit business.

An example of how these skills translate into real life also occurred this week as Natalie Martinez was asked to speak at a fundraiser for Girls Inc., a non-profit which is a subsidiary of the Boys and Girls Club. Girls Inc. is focused on providing opportunities for girls to develop skills that will help them be successful in life. Natalie was the only student who spoke, and shortly after her speech, \$158,000 was raised. Mr. Martyn's mother was in attendance and believed that Natalie's words greatly influenced the amount of giving at the event. As we break for Thanksgiving, I am extremely thankful for a thriving MUN program that develops our Tillers and gives them real skills that will be useful now and in the future.

Another program for which I am grateful is T-Tech because of the real-life applicable skills it provides. I had the opportunity to check in on them last Sunday at the LA Chargers headquarters. They competed to see who could develop a device to project a small football for both accuracy

and distance. I actually enjoyed watching them problem-solve up to the time they were to operate their device. They were excited that their machine performed its best when it counted, and it earned them first place among 25 schools. On top of that, they will get to attend the Chargers game this Sunday and be on the sidelines during half time.

I was also thankful this week for three important meetings convened to discuss our students and how we can continue to develop them from a social-emotional perspective. Tuesday afternoon was a unique faculty meeting which involved several students. We have a Challenge Success team of diverse stakeholders who are looking into the social-emotional well-being of our students. Our students today face many challenges and stressors, and this team is focused on understanding those dynamics and implementing adjustments to support our students in their high school journey. During our meeting, teachers listened to 8 students answer questions about their high school experience and what causes them stress. The conversation was sandwiched between two dramatic performances that were thought provoking as well. It was powerful to hear from students about how much teachers impact their experience. They shared many positives about our staff and also tactfully communicated adjustments that would help make it an even better experience. One young lady candidly shared her struggle with mental health and communicated with staff on what helps and what doesn't. I was grateful for the courage of these students to speak and the willingness of our teachers to listen.

Another important meeting occurred the next day after school in the form of our monthly SEL committee meeting. This group supports the implementation of SEL strategies in the classroom. The belief is that if we connect with students, they will be in a better place to learn more. We want to care for the whole child, not just their academics. Ironically, the research shows this is the best way to grow their academic learning. The SEL committee used a collaborative structure to debrief the previous meeting to tease out what students communicated in the fishbowl activity.

On the very next day, the MTSS/PBIS committee met to continue their work to support a positive environment that addresses expectations for all students and how we can acknowledge students stepping up to those expectations. One of the ways that happens is through Tiller Triumphs. Every two weeks teachers identify students who receive a fruit snack and a short message about how they stepped up to school wide expectations; to be respectful, be engaged, and be determined. We are also looking at how we can acknowledge those students who had no tardies, no truancies, no referrals and no D's or F's. So far, we know that 779 students had no tardies the first quarter. It will be interesting to see how many students meet all the criteria. The committee wants to set it up so that these students are identified each quarter.

Our Challenge Success Survey results showed that while we have room to grow, our students perceive our school in a very positive light. This isn't an accident. I am so grateful to all on our team who passionately serve our students. It is the norm to see adults reaching out and going above and beyond to support our students. That is something for which I am extremely grateful.

Teachers are not the only ones who work hard to grow our students. We have some great coaches as well who shape our students. This week, we learned that our Water Polo coach, Cesar Altamirano, was named CIF Coach of the Year. He and Kyle Brawley have really turned the water polo and swimming programs around in recent years, and it was great to see Cesar be recognized.

In all the news about fall sports, I don't want our winter sports to be over-shadowed. This was an impressive start to the winter season as girls' water polo, girls' basketball, and boys' basketball each picked up two victories this week. Boys' and girls' wrestling go at it tomorrow in a tournament, and I am looking forward to watching boys' soccer tonight.

This reflection is quickly reminding me that this was a busy week. However, I am so grateful for the opportunity to participate and observe so much of this activity. I am grateful for a school that offers so many ways to support students. It is even more awesome to me that I work with a team of people who are always trying to find ways to get better at what they do.

Enjoy the Thanksgiving week and Go Tillers!

Dr. Jon Tuin

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