

## Supt. Comments – March 2013

Recently, the school system has had to deal with a series of unforeseen and unfortunate ethical lapses by employees. Dealing with such matters is very troubling and difficult to explain. Some matters simply defy explanation. Yet, it is our duty to deal with them. Ethical issues with employees draws into question the trust of the community more so than anything else we have to deal with. We want the public to trust us, to trust our handling of these difficult matters, and to trust us when we say that safety is a top priority. As I have mentioned before, as a father, I can assure you that I take this matter to heart.

I have often told the Board of Education that our school system is a very defensive place. I do not say this for it to be taken as a bad thing. But, some of our people often struggle with constructive criticism and some do not feel that improvement is possible in certain circumstances. As a matter of personal responsibility, I think improvement is always possible. I try to lead by example when talking about improvement. I know I have improvement to make in many areas and most of the battle is won when acknowledgement is granted that there is an issue and it needs to be fixed.

The issue with ethical lapses needs to be fixed. No stone was left unturned to ascertain if other employees knew about these latest incidents. After a thorough investigation I do not think so. It is possible that other students knew about it, so it is imperative to me that we build a culture that will report such incidents so they can be handled. I can assure you that we handle such incidents...in close conjunction with law enforcement.

Max and I are continuing with our ethics training at all schools. As witnessed in our ethics PDSA tonight, that is just the first of many steps we will be taking. When you look at the newspapers across this state, you see a growing trend that is very troubling to everyone. We see it in all areas of society, people in positions of trust who do things that are wrong. I was talking to a school last week and pointing out the multiple instances of school employees that had ethical violations but also the financial advisor that stole from clients and the church treasurer that embezzled money...all positions of trust that violated that trust. As a school system, we

cannot afford to have ethical incidents anymore. We must regain the trust of our community.

We do have a totally separate but related cultural issue that we must also acknowledge. I am by no means seeking to blame anyone, but we do have a culture among some young people that says that sexual activity at a young age is ok. We have the data that shows that we are number 2 per capita in the state in the number of teenage pregnancies. We have worked with the Health Department on a grant to work on this issue but they recently withdrew from providing this service for some reason. The data suggests that ignoring the problem is the last thing we need to do. There is much more work to be done on this issue so we, as a school system, will pick it up. A goal was added to our Strategic Plan tonight. We must identify ways to stem that tide. We have a culture where it is taboo to talk about sexual activity and apparently to report it even if one knows it is wrong. Simply put, that has to stop.

We have covered much tonight that we will be doing in this school system to deal with re-culturing our school system. Ethical behavior by our employees will be one of our top values. I will see to that if I do nothing else. I have been very focused on instruction and facilities this year. But, I have the ability to focus on these cultural issues as well. Part of being a person of integrity begins with acknowledging that a problem exists and accepting responsibility for it. The drive to get past defensiveness starts at the top and I hope to lead by example on this issue. As Superintendent, the buck stops with me. I accept responsibility for the recent lapses in ethical conduct by our employees. And I accept full responsibility in doing everything that I can to fix it.