

MONDAY MESSAGE

FROM DR. MCFARLAND



Leaving Nothing Up To Chance

March 26, 2018

The master schedule is one of the most deadly weapons of the war on choices and opportunities of students. The reality is that the fate of many students who have not won the lucky lotto of life is the master scheduler. We all know that our most school-dependent children need the best trained and most equipped educator.

However, it is oftentimes those students who need the best and brightest who get the less experienced. It should be a privilege to teach those hardest to teach, and teachers should be rewarded significantly for their effort.

This weekend I was traveling to my daughter's league volleyball game, and I stopped at a convenience store for some snacks. I realized that I would have \$1 and some change left over. I got that burning sensation that my grandma used to talk about all the time. I mean the dollar was literally burning a hole in my hand. She used to always say to my cousins and I that every time we got a dime, we acted like it was burning a hole in our pockets.

For a split second, I was scouring the convenience store like I did almost 40 years ago looking for something on which to spend the hot dollar I had in my hand. My eyes fell on the lottery tickets. I thought about it for a second but quickly came back to reality, found a couple pieces of candy and left the store. As I exited, I saw a large rectangular sign that read, "We sold a Winning Lottery Ticket Here." For a split second, I almost turned around and went back in, but my aversion to gambling made me ignore it. I heard my grandma's voice and decided against engaging in the lotto.



My thoughts began to drift toward work and the mission that we are pursuing in Crowley. I thought about the things we are doing and the things that I aspire for us to do in the future. I realize that unconsciously I have developed an aversion to engaging in situations where the outcomes are a gamble and randomness is allowed to reign supreme. As I think about the educational system that we desire to create, I am clear that we have to build a new model that relies more on deliberate action informed by results and less on randomness, chance or good intentions.

To build a system that serves all students in a way that equips them to achieve their full potential and leave our schools with choices and opportunities, we have to be willing to do things differently and invest in things that we may not have seen as necessary in the past.

When I think about the lottery concept in relation to the work that we are doing, we have to first start at the beginning of our system. The gap that we identify that is present throughout our system from grades 3 on is a gap that starts before students get to school and continues to widen throughout their educational experience. If students are lucky, maybe they get into programs that provide them an enriched experience and they move forward faster. On the other hand, for students who won the lucky lotto of life, they are engaged in educational experiences from 3 years on forward, and by the time they get to kindergarten, they are on track and ready to learn to read. These students won the lotto of birth and are primed to succeed throughout the system with the normal amount of support. The other students, however, are more school dependent and their success depends, in some cases, on luck and the automated master schedule system. If they are lucky, the computer program places them in the classroom that has the right conditions and they flourish, but if they are not, their fate may be sealed without the heroic efforts of educators.

What I want to do is design a system where we are intentional and deliberate about the supports that students receive and that we rely less on luck and heroic efforts and more on applying what we know to what we do. I am nearing my sixth month in the district, and I am more convinced today than I have ever been that we can achieve the target for which we aim. We can become the top in Tarrant County if we take our time today and become deliberative about expanding early childhood options, developing the Crowley way for literacy and increasing student exposure to high-quality 21st century learning experiences in a way that makes what occurs in school relevant to students' future life choices and opportunities.

The task at hand is a difficult one, but with deliberate action we can beat the odds. My grandma despised games of chance and so do I. I appreciate each one of you who are daily taking the responsibility to ensure that our students and their fate is not dependant on luck. I challenge each one of you to continue to provide high-quality instruction recognizing that our students educational experience is too important to be left up to chance.

With something to think about, I'm Dr. Mike McFarland, challenging you to leave nothing to chance.

Dr. Michael D. McFarland
Superintendent, Crowley ISD