

September 2017

I was reviewing some old documents when I ran across a column I wrote in the spring of my first year in Guthrie. I find it as relevant today as it was then. Because of the timely relevance, I'm choosing to re-print it with minimal editing.

I'm unhappy with something my child's teacher did. What should I do? I've heard this question many times by involved parents who love their child but were frustrated with something that happened at school. Many different options are available when a parent is unhappy with the school district. Those options obviously vary with the situation and require the parent or even the child to reach out to someone.

I actually remember a time when I was in High School and didn't like a policy created by the principal. I made an appointment and visited with him about it because I believed I was right. From an early age, I was taught by my parents that if a person truly has the courage of their convictions they should never be afraid to visit with the person closest to a decision or action they disagree with. This principle opens a line of communication that can quickly identify gaps in communication or differences in philosophy.

People who lack the courage of their convictions to employ this principle are attempting to vent their frustration but lack the follow through to seek a true change in behavior. In essence, they are complainers. This can often be found by postings on social media. While this action might allow people to surround the complainer with people that sympathize with their situation, it offers little if any opportunity to improve communication and change the situation.

The next piece of this conflict resolution puzzle rests with us...the school district. We have an obligation to listen to the issue and determine if a solution that benefits all is possible. Occasionally, when I have encountered a conflict with a parent and our district, the first call the parent made was to the news media. I believe there are two reasons this would be the first call made by the parent. Either the parent wants the attention of the media or they believe the school district won't listen to them without public pressure. The school district can't control the first reason but we can make sure when a parent has a problem we as a district listen to their concerns.

So who do I call??? As I stated earlier, calling the staff member closest to the conflict is where you should start. This normally means calling a teacher or coach. The best way to reach them other than by e-mail is to call the main office of the school where they teach and leave a message with your number and at least two times during the next 24 hours when it is best to call. Many people, when they are mad, want to call the person in charge of the overall situation (Principal or Superintendent) because they believe the problem will be fixed sooner. When a person does this it actually lengthens the time to reach a resolution because they will then be referred to the

person closest to the situation. If a resolution cannot be achieved or a staff member is non-responsive, then the next person to visit with is the building principal.

Occasionally a resolution may not be reached that all parties find acceptable. I always remind parents that we will make the best decisions for the entire district. Unfortunately, in rare cases, some may not like a decision. Those cases bring to light the challenges in running any organization. The decisions will always be made to benefit the greatest good of the district.

It is hard to believe we are almost done with the first nine weeks. I hope you can get out to enjoy the great fall weather ahead. Go Bluejays!!!