

November 2, 2011

Palm Beach County School Board Members,

As I prepare to leave the District, I have decided to send you a letter of encouragement. I have done it in writing so that I could work on it until it had a level of clarity and purpose that is satisfactory, so that my message could not be misread or misquoted, and so that I could be certain to give the same message to all of you. I have been struggling for some time with how best to approach this task, and even with whether I should do it. I have now convinced myself that it needs to be done, and that this is the best way to do it.

I have spoken several times about the wonderful things you have accomplished when the timing is right, and when the common goal has become more important than individual opinions. I have been disappointed recently that these moments have seemed to happen less and less often. On October 24th, I attended the Dow Memorial with many of you, and we heard over and over how Mr. Dow had helped create an atmosphere of collaboration between the District and the teachers that has allowed us to have vastly improved relationships. Candidly, it sometimes seems to me that we have a better, more mutually supportive relationship with the Teachers' Union than we do with each other. On October 25th, while driving to work, I heard that the rescue workers trying to find survivors of the earthquake in Turkey had found a TWO WEEK OLD baby, alive, and pulled her out of the rubble. Also alive were her Mother and Grandmother. Those workers, who most likely did not previously know each other and who may have had widely different backgrounds, had come together for a single purpose; to focus on the "prize"; in this case the "prize" was saving lives. For us, if we all were put in separate rooms and asked what is the "prize" for the School District, I would wager that we all would come up with some variation having to do with student achievement, whether it is educating every child, or each child, or graduation rates, or test score goals, or something else, all the answers would have to do with student achievement. In my judgment, if we could always remember that the "prize" is what is really important, and focus on that above all else, we would find that we, more and more often, would find the best solution, rather than wandering off track into counterproductive debates and discussions. I am in no way suggesting that we need to agree all the time. I am suggesting simply that we need to find a way to work together for the common good, and represent such to the community, even if we disagree in fundamental ways.

I also want to include a little about Board Member and staff roles and responsibilities. Many of you were new when I arrived, and many of you asked me for help in defining your roles. It has been suggested to me that with so many of us, me included, having little or no prior experience in our positions, friction around roles and responsibilities was bound to occur. Perhaps that is the case. In any event, in my view it is now time, eight months later, to move beyond that, and to be sure that we are all spending absolutely as much of our time as is possible doing what we are supposed to be doing. As Board Members, in addition to your many other responsibilities, each of you can play an important role as our most publicly visible "marketers and champions" for the myriad of wonderful education products and services our District employees work so hard to provide to our community. I have attached copies of our Board Policies on Responsibilities of the District School Board (Policy 1.011) and Responsibilities of the Superintendent of Schools (Policy 1.012.) for your reference.

Now, please forgive a few specific examples having to do with roles and responsibilities, and please do not feel left out or picked on; there are plenty to go around 😊:

- If a constituent calls, please do not automatically give them to the Superintendent or CAO for action. Please help us make the chain of command do its job. Selfishly, I have plenty to do without being told by a Board Member that I have to see someone just because they have gotten an audience with a board member. More importantly, we need our leaders at all levels to do their jobs. To do otherwise is both an inefficient use of our increasingly limited resources, and disrespectful to their professionalism. You may refer them to us to figure out who they should talk to, but don't give them access that is inappropriate for their issue. In almost every case, a school issue needs first to be addressed by the school.
- If you refer a constituent, please do not tell us the answer to the problem. We do need to get the rest of the story. Believe it or not, you do not always get the whole story from the constituent, and you can actually expose yourself if you take sides.
- Please do not promise a constituent that we will call them "today." We may need to make contact with other staff and/or we may need to do research. We also may have conflicts that require our attendance and participation. We would appreciate 48 hours, perhaps 24 if it is a real critical issue. If you give them a call back time and we fail it, we are off to a bad start in resolving whatever it is, and you will most likely get yet another call from that constituent.
- If a letter is addressed to a Principal and you get a copy, you do not need to reply to it. The Principal will respond.
- I value your recommendations on personnel matters, but at the end of the day I have to decide. You simply do not have authority to tell us to hire, fire, promote or take any other personnel action on any particular employee.
- We try hard not to surprise you; please give us the same courtesy. Sometimes it is not possible to avoid a surprise, but it is a worthy goal.
- We will always try to please you. Please be aware of the impact of your requests on the staff. Try to avoid asking for excessive amounts of stuff. The better you can articulate what you need, the better we will be able to be responsive.

Finally, I feel compelled to provide one example that exemplifies the right way to get things done: You charged us with meeting the Class Size requirements. You allocated the funds we requested for that purpose, and you told us to get it done. **Then, you left us alone to do it.** Some of you needed more or less feedback on our progress and our feelings as to the probability of success. That is absolutely appropriate. What you did not do is tell us how to do it, or who to do it with, or who to avoid giving responsibility to. This task reached far and wide within the District. The challenge was huge. Over 100,000 core classes had to comply, with no margin for error. Success required total focus and teamwork, trust, and cooperation. The mountain was very high, but we were determined. And, as you know, it got done. Although this task was very important, I think by far the most important aspect is that

it proves this organization can come together, focus as one on the target, and accomplish the job. If this organization can meet class size, it can do whatever it is asked, so long as the necessary resources are there, and the task is adequately defined. My sincere hope is that we all will build on this example. I hope that we all will realize the tremendous good that can be achieved by displaying trust in our organization and its leaders to carry out your direction. And finally, I hope that, as we do what you have asked, that we can count on your support and encouragement, every step of the way.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve the School District of Palm Beach County. You energized and excited me, while at the same time you gave me great pause about whether I could meet your expectations. Although I am very disappointed that I am not able to finish the time period that I signed on for, I am extremely enthusiastic about the ability of the District to continue its positive momentum and to successfully accomplish whatever policy direction you give it. I am also totally confident that you as the School Board will establish yourself as a truly superior Board that governs effectively by providing appropriate policy direction to the staff, and that your ethical compasses will ensure that you do all of that with integrity.

With Great Respect and Admiration for Your Service,

Bill Malone