



Tomorrow's News Today

News From the Tomorrow River School District

From Michael Toelle, District Administrator

October 2017

"It Takes a Village to Raise a Child"

The origin of the popular saying "It takes a village to raise a child" is a true mystery. Some people believe it may have originated as an ancient African proverb. Others believe it came from a Native American tribe. Well, it really doesn't matter how old the phrase is or where it came from, the term still applies just as much today as it did 1,000 years ago.

One of our district goals this year is to create a common set of student behavior and academic expectations which can be applied throughout the entire school. Whether a child is in kindergarten or is a graduating senior, the expectations would pertain. This is an idea we have pondered for a couple of years, especially since seeing the outcome of implementing the PBIS (Positive Behavior and Instructional Supports) program in our elementary and middle schools.

For those not familiar with it, PBIS focuses on applying strategies and changing environments so that using positive behaviors becomes more effective for children than using negative behaviors. Through PBIS, we have found using common language to support students and reinforce desired behaviors is critical. Prior to PBIS we too often assumed the students should just know our expectations and how we wanted them to behave in the halls, on the playground, at athletic events, and in the lunch room. Establishing a set of expectations and teaching the students the desired behavior has made a huge difference to our elementary and middle school students' behavior and academic success.

Where am I going with this? Since Amherst is a K-12 building, students at all levels frequently interact on the bus, in the halls, and possibly even in the lunch room, so it is helpful to ensure all staff can address any student's behavior. If a 1st grade teacher observes a behavior by a 10th grade student and is aware the behavior doesn't fit our set of expectations, the teacher then has the ability to address the behavior. Teachers would no longer need to seek out a high school teacher or an administrator to address the behavior, since they could automatically take care of it. A byproduct of establishing a common set of expectations is that we are able to use the entire school district staff to help students make good decisions and be successful. It really is taking our entire school community or village to raise the child.

In addition, once the expectations are created within the school, the plan is to inform district parents and community members of the expectations so they, too, can apply the same practice when possible. Communication, consistency, and follow-through are key when dealing with young children, and in this case will allow the entire Amherst community, or village, to assist in raising all of our children. As a district, we're hoping to have the expectations set within a couple of months and then get them rolled out to all staff, parents, and the community.

On another note, I have to say it's been a very enjoyable and smooth start to the school year. Our students have adjusted to new high school expectations related to phones and hats, academic engagement is very high, the parent drop-off/pick-up loop is busy but uneventful, and overall student behavior has been excellent. In an e-mail to the staff a few days ago, I congratulated them on the smooth start, but I did remind them that we will undoubtedly run into challenges this year. It would be nice if nothing came up, but being realistic and recognizing that with 1200 students, 500-plus sets of parents, and 135 employees, issues will arise that need to be addressed. The key to being successful in these

situations will be keeping an open mind and communicating effectively to find suitable solutions. If a situation does arise, please remember: my door is always open, my computer is on, and my phone is available for calls. Let's work together to raise the children of the district. Until next month, have a safe and enjoyable fall season.