

Juliana's November 2016 Message

November 8, Election Day was also a district wide Professional Learning day for our AB teachers. Faculty gathered at individual schools in the morning and then the entire district came together in the afternoon in order to hear Denise Pope, author and consultant, speak about our district-wide Challenge Success work. This work explores three high leverage areas; homework, schedules and assessment and aims to "provide schools and families with the information and strategies they need to create a more balanced and academically fulfilling life for their kids."

Many community members heard Denise speak Tuesday evening as she addressed our community, speaking to our own demographics, challenges and district data (surveys were given to 6-12th graders last year) as well as other information. With humor and expertise she delivered important messages that resonated with many of us. "You want to build responsibility in your children? Give them chores! There is no research to support that homework builds responsibility in children." She talked about our overscheduled children and how we can help our children slow down. Though these messages can certainly evoke varying reactions and feelings, Denise left us all wanting to talk more and think more about how to raise our children to be balanced, successful and happy people.

What encouraged me most about this Professional Learning day was the work that we did as teachers at Merriam School. Teachers gathered at 8:15, visited and sipped coffee, before we began our important work promptly at 8:30. As a staff, we grappled with these high leverage areas, including how best to design a schedule that is child-centered. We discussed the merits of homework and continued our work thinking about how to carefully look at the issue of homework, what it means for all students and what the ultimate purpose is for these assignments. We also thought more deeply about the idea of assessment. We came to an understanding of how important assessment is, and we also grappled with what is enough and how to make it truly meaningful for the work we do with children.

Merriam teachers truly care about your children. The deep care and the consideration of the whole child remained at the center of these conversations. We talked about learning styles and how to nurture uniqueness and creativity in our children. We discussed how important social thinking, self-regulation and awareness of others and self are skills we value and must teach. We strategized about building relationships and instilling values around caring and kindness into the work we do with children in each moment, whether it is literature, math or Open Circle.

I also reflected on the fact that while these conversations felt powerful on that November morning, they did not feel new to Merriam School. Since I arrived here over two years ago, our teachers have been engaging in the work that makes our work as educators not only incredibly important in a changing world, but also incredibly challenging. Our teachers have been making purposeful decisions about how they assign work, how they teach your children to prepare

and how to prioritize the emotional well being of our students each and every day. And, though this conversation is not new, it is the ongoing consideration of these values and the striving to always do better that make us the school we are, Merriam School.

Teachers know their students. They connect with them daily- they ask questions and they raise concerns when something feels askew. And, though I believe we will continue to grow and support one another in reaching each child, and nurturing each of their talents and skills, I'm encouraged and heartened to share with you how fortunate your child is to be in a school where his or her teacher believes in their happiness, building their confidence and working together with parents to build this team of support.

And so, amidst what has been a challenging fall for many, we remember this week, in honor of Thanksgiving that there is so much to be grateful for. And most of all, I am grateful for our children, and hopeful for our future.