

“You know I’m gonna be like him...”

It is October now. In fact, by the time you read this, you’ll be feeling the soft breath of November on your neck. Another ten days or so and they’ll be no turning back. I didn’t write an article last month. That’s a warning that this is going to be a long one. If you’re of a mind, you might want to pause and get a cup of coffee. Or brew a cup of tea and wait until the kids get on the bus.

As I said, there was no chance for reflection last month. Nothing serious really, I just got caught up in the newness of the school year. Like your kids rushing into the house fresh off the school bus, or like the group of teenagers suddenly commandeering your living room after a game, the energy of all those young people returning to campus was something just to be enjoyed...and I respect you too much to waste both our time making something up. I figured things were probably going pretty well at your house anyway. If it was anything like mine, the new ways of talking that kids get from hanging out with other kids all day still had its novelty, and was sometimes even cute. But the time and the weather are changing.

First quarter is just about over. It will soon be time for Parent/Teacher Conferences. If the truth be told, as a parent, I’m not a conference fan. It feels terrible saying it out loud. And I know all the data of how important it is. I understand as an educator, parent engagement is a critical piece of student achievement. But as a dad, I figure in either direction, if there’s a problem, there’s always the phone. Maybe this year though... Maybe this year I’m going to make contact with my kid’s teachers. Oh I know about his grades. That ProgressBook grade drop alert is a dad’s best friend. The cat’s meow. I know the minute he misses an assignment. Or his grade drops below a B minus...It’s the other things about my son I want to know.

I know he’ll learn to read...and know his numbers...and understand all that essential stuff we teach in school. I know the teachers are doing their job. And I know I’m doing my part at home. He’s getting all his work done. He’s studying and reviewing. He’s getting all of his assignments in. But I want to know if I’m teaching him the other stuff too. This year I’m going to ask the questions whose answers may be hard to hear...what does he do when the boy in front of him in the hall gets his books knocked out of his hands?...what about at recess when the girl chasing him falls down and gets hurt?...when is the last time he gave up his place in line?...does he care about others around him?...does he show compassion?...does he have empathy?...does he want to be understood, or does he strive to understand?...does he laugh WITH others?...Teacher, who do you see when you look at my son?

What am I helping him to become?

This morning I saw my eight year old take down his ten year old brother verbally. Now this is my snuggle buddy in the mornings...all peaches and cream. But that is not the boy I saw today. He has certainly learned a lot. Did he get that from home? Did he learn that at school? The fact that I don’t know the answer is probably the most important one. This year I’m going to ask the important questions. I’m going to find out what kind of person they see when they look at my child.

And my kindergartner from last year? You remember her. Dan Valentine seemed to have written a poem about her: “one little girl...in a crispy dress...with two blue eyes and a happy

laugh that ripples all day long... and a flash of light blonde hair that bounces in the sunlight when she runs". He was right. For five full years I was "her sage, and Santa Clause and pal and playmate and father and friend". And as is only right, she has learned to share her worship with her teachers. I am no longer the smartest man in the whole world. But is it too late to touch that part of her again? To make HER remember? And what about the ten year old whose day wasn't complete without spending time with me in the shop? Or what about Sophie? Does my Sophia remember how every night we would wash and blow dry her hair, and giggle about everything that happened that day? Harry Chapin was right. The Cat's in the Cradle.

But I also know it's never too late. Early in the morning, at the third hour, at the sixth hour, at the ninth hour, at the eleventh hour; it is never too late. Often it is the first who are last and the last who are first. It is an eternal truth. The literature texts across the globe are full of stories of comings home, of prodigal sons, of last minute sacrifices that change the course of human life. We know it is going to be hard. For teachers, for moms, for dads, and for kids. Whether attributed to Plato 2500 years ago or Ian MaClaren 120 years ago, the adage rings true. "Be kind. Everyone you meet is carrying a heavy burden." The questions for us parents is are we teaching them what we want them to know and are we modeling the traits so that they may develop into the people we want them to become? Do they see us practicing temperance and self-control, tolerance and understanding of others, prudence and wisdom in our actions, and courage in the face of adversities.

As for me, I'm not going to wait and look back on it after it's all over. I'm going to go ask some people who see them all day long. Who do they see?

Now, I've got to go home and see a little boy blue...



Rodge F. Wilson, Superintendent