

MONDAY MESSAGE

FROM DR. MCFARLAND



Make your students smile on the inside

February 26, 2018

I recently had the opportunity to go to Jasper to relax and visit my mom, sister, brother and grandma. While visiting, my brother and I decided to take our girls to our old elementary and junior high schools.

It was a strange feeling walking on the playground and seeing many of the same slides, swings and monkey bars that were there 32 years ago. We walked around the building and found windows to our former classrooms. As I looked inside, I immediately visualized how the classroom looked 35 years ago.

Afterwards, we stopped by the gas station and I ran into my eighth grade English teacher, Mrs. Chaney. I recognized her immediately. I told her who I was and extended my hand. She reached out and hugged me and told me she was proud of me. I smiled on outside, but flinched on the inside.

When I was in the eighth grade, my mom expected me to get into Honors English, but I was a little hesitant. I had heard it was tough, and my friends were signing up for regular English.



Although I knew what my mom expected, it was my teacher's expectation and direction that I followed. I asked Mrs. Chaney whether she thought I could be in Honors English as a ninth grader. She frowned as she looked at me and told me I should sign up for regular English, because I was not Honors English material.

I immediately signed up for the regular class, and felt relieved, until I thought about what she was actually saying.

I remember thinking she doesn't think I am smart enough for Honors English. I never told my mom and I never forgot how it made me feel. It destroyed my self-concept, because up until that point, I thought I was as smart as anyone else. It is amazing that after all these years, the memory of that moment and how I felt because of that interchange is still as vivid as if it happened yesterday.

Our words, actions, thoughts and non-verbals are constantly communicating messages to students about who we think they are. Whether you know it or not, it makes a difference.

There is no way in the world that Mrs. Chaney could have remembered that interchange, because it lasted a mere six seconds, but those six words, "you are not Honors English material" have stuck with me for 27 years.

What will your students think about you when they see you 20 or 30 years from now? They may smile on the outside and be cordial to you, but what will they remember about their experience with you? They may not remember all of the lessons you taught, but they will remember if you gave up on them, or if you allowed them to give up on themselves. I refuse to do it and pray that you will not either.

For many of our students and parents, we don't send the right message in what we say, what we think and how we act. Our students and parents are constantly searching for signals about what you really think about them and they will respond to your expectations.

I truly believe that we have an awesome responsibility before us. We have the power to build up and the power to destroy. We have over countless opportunities per student to make a significant difference, but we must be cognizant of this power and take advantage of this opportunity.

I challenge you to become merchants of hope and send a message to our students that they can do more. You can send that message by doing more yourself and refusing to accept less. If we can do that on a daily basis, your students will not only be smiling on the outside, but they will walk away with a smile on the inside as well.

With something to think about, I am Dr. Mike McFarland, believing in your greatness and acting with intention and expectation to make it so.

Dr. Michael D. McFarland
Superintendent, Crowley ISD