

Journal Entry 1

September – October 2016

By Deirdre Wilson-Redmond, Leaders as Learners : Cohort 17

Since the beginning of the school year, my Principal Olga Reyes has given me ample opportunities to exhibit leadership and hone the skills that produce quality leaders. After meeting at Paterson' district headquarters over the Summer, before the building was habitable, Ms. Reyes availed the opportunity to write a welcome letter to the staff inviting them in for a visit. Though the "Visit Day" never happened I did experience the letter editing process with one of the two vice principals.

Once school started, Olga asked me to investigate the ScIP team procedures and purpose. I consulted with her after doing extensive research on what "ScIP" actually was and how it would impact the school community. I scheduled the meeting, prepared the appropriate and required paperwork (minutes, sign in sheet) and invited the participants. I also distributed handouts to the participants after consulting with the Principal on who on the list were viable candidates. After preparing the emailed notifications-of-meeting, we met four times in the morning before school started, each time for 45 minutes. In several of the meetings, the principal stepped away to enable me to handle the meeting.

In preparation for the opening ceremonies of the brand new School 16, I was asked to produce a poetry presentation with my 8th grade ELA students. They did create a spoken word/rap piece, singing the praises of the new structure and its faculty. After the ribbon-cutting ceremony, we received district-wide acclaim, even making it into the local media feeds. In turn I created a Back-to-School night video, which included a piecemeal profusion of various school-life moments. After viewing it and sharing it with the parents who were present, it was agreed that the viewing audience needed to be widened. Principal Reyes had the link put on the School 16's homepage as an example of teacher best practice.

I also implemented a new buddy reading program where two to three 8th graders read to students from the younger grades (Pre-K to 8th grade) in order for them to read for 10 to 15 minutes. I created this plan to foster leadership and community responsibility in the older students. This plan is to be a yearlong initiative beginning in November. The students who read and rotate their responsibilities will be called the Reading Rainbow Rockets. I also suggested that the students be able to log community service hours doing this and other helpful activities. The idea was well received by my principal.

Journal Entry 2

November 2, 2016

By Deirdre Wilson-Redmond, Leaders as Learners : Cohort 17

Today I had a unique opportunity to walk the hallowed halls (several times over) trying to locate the 17 people who are on the SciP committee for the purpose of obtaining each of their signatures. This exercise, a request of my principal, was done in order to obtain a legal document of sorts reflecting the commitment of the faculty members who agreed to be a part of the task force. I took both my prep and my lunch to go door-to-door to obtain their signatures (I felt a little like a politician). The true value of the experience was that it gave me 'face time' aka one-to-one time with key faculty members who along with myself will help shape the backbone of the ideology and successful running of the school. Though I faced a bit of frustration at times through the day (I couldn't find everyone the first go round or the second for that matter), I did feel like I had accomplished a leadership function away and apart from my teacher responsibilities. I say this because simultaneously, today I was administering the Unit 1 Assessment to all of my students AND trying to finalize my both of my SGO – very teacher-driven activities.

I just returned from a superior convention in Orlando, FL where I was fed by and in the midst of hosts of like-minded individuals (over 1,000), literally from around the world, whom are as passionate as I am about teaching both children and adults alike to read. I even had a trusted advisor tell me that becoming a principal is the one true place of power that can truly impact students in the areas on which IDA focuses. I got goose-bumps hearing him (a very high-powered NJ attorney who advocates for dyslexics having argued on the Supreme Court level on their behalf) say that to me because his words help to give the work I am doing greater purpose.

I am struggling on certain days, however, with having one foot in the classroom, one toe in the work of an administrator and a limb in the grad school classroom. It can be overwhelming at times. I'm just saying.

Journal Entry 3

November 15, 2016

By Deirdre Wilson-Redmond, Leaders as Learners: Cohort 17

As assigned Designee of the ScIP team for our building, I was responsible for scheduling our November meeting, sending out the meeting announcement, taking the minutes and then sending the minutes to the staff. Since we have no letterhead for ScIP, my principal asked me to create it before preparing the minutes. It was interesting to take the minutes have them completely approved by my principal and then distribute them to the school staff.

I combed through the minutes and found typos that needed correcting. Even after submitting it publicly, I was nervous that as a ELA teacher I had misrepresented my craft somehow by not correcting them all.

It has been a very busy time at our school. We had to insure that the students were in uniform by November 7th. This has been an interesting process, especially in policing the middle schoolers. The teachers were allowed to purchase "spiritwear" and the kids all wanted to wear the fleeces and hoodies they saw us wearing. The only problem was that the principal had already set forth a mandate that no hoodies could be worn by students in school. Seeing the profusion of hoodie wearers and to appease the population, she decided to allow them to purchase the "spirit wear Hoodies" and even asked the PTO to supplement the purchase of the hoodies so the students would only have to pay \$10 out of their own pockets.

When Principal Reyes announced this decision to my class (a class she says she feels comfortable communicating with and confident that they will share the info she imparts to them), she commented that some in the building are calling her a "Softie" for giving in to the hoodie issue. We (she and I) agreed that she is a "Hard Softy." (smile)

It was a good exposure to how building leaders have to compromise sometimes.

Journal Entry 4

November 20, 2016

By Deirdre Wilson-Redmond, Leaders as Learners : Cohort 17

Somehow I am managing to balance teaching with preparing to become an administrator. Throughout the process, however, I do find myself thinking about how I will be able to stay connected to the students in an administrator's role. My passion is the little people at my core. I am capable of doing the paper-pushing tasks but my heart will also be with the individual little hearts and minds, who come before me to learn and grow.

Since being in Paterson, I have always found it daunting to just teach from one marking period to the next without a break or acknowledgement of the success/failure model and so I created the Redmond High-Flying Phoenix Honor Power Lunch to celebrate the success of those students who came to the table and learned. Of my 45 students, 33 were invited to this luncheon, which I hosted (they contributed \$5 each and it cost me about \$250 all included). Though I wanted to cater to the community (or really have it catered by a community proprietor), I was not prepared lingually to converse on short notice with a local restaurant, so I purchased and transported the food late the night before from a wonderful Italian place in Bergen County.

My principal was invited, along with her two vice principals, to the Italian Feast as it was dubbed. The prerequisite for the invitation (which was a handwritten, personalized note on designer notecards to each student) was that they had shown leadership and community service during the marking period. Leadership could be present in the form of academics or an act of kindness or goodwill. The students who were my Teacher's Helpers and the distribution specialists (who carted and toted laptops for the entire class) were also represented and acknowledged. Regular school attendance was at the top of my list of attributes befitting an attendee because as I said to them the learning occurs primarily when you are present. During the 1.5 hour event we watched Zootopia and talked about plot, setting and characters intermittently as students relaxed with their friends.

These are the types of little extras that I feel are important to motivate students and those who were not invited understood that they have to step up their game if they want to be a part of the next luncheon. My principal was happy at how many students actually did make the first cut. Oh and those who were unable to pay still were able to come. I am hoping they will cherish the handwritten notes that I sent them. Oh and btw, I taught 4 students (3 girls and 1 boy) how to prepare a place setting on a my cloth placemats. This is the Home Economics part of me coming out (my mother's teaching influence) because maybe one day they may get a job waitressing to pay for college, or something and they should know how to do it.

I adore my current administrator. I think her style of leading is one that I will closely emulate, if given the chance.