

BOE Public Comment
9/18/08
Christopher Lloyd, Teacher

“In a completely rational society, the best of us would be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less,” wrote Lee Iacocca. And as we sit this week amid an estimated \$1 billion state shortfall and what many economists call the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, I humbly come before you to say that we should focus our resources on Goal 4 of our Strategic Plan – now more than ever we need to create a positive work environment in an organization that is self-renewing.

I’ll start by saying what we all know – good teachers inspire students to go from good to great – they can be radical transformers in a child’s life. That’s why we’ve placed such an emphasis on recruiting and retaining a highly qualified diverse workforce. Yet at times, we as classroom teachers find that, as one author put it, we are like candles – lighting the way for others whilst consuming ourselves. Don’t get me wrong – this is the best job I have EVER had – I absolutely love the challenges that teaching presents...but I do sometimes wonder how long my colleagues and I can keep this pace up in the classroom.

Which takes me to employee well-being, satisfaction, and positive morale – all crucial to a child’s learning, and an organization’s success. Ask employees in MCPS what they enjoy most in their career, and they will tell you the time they spend/spent in the classroom. Among children, one connects with the soul of the profession – for me, each morning when I teach my work comes alive. Because every morning, every school day, I have a gut check, when I stand and face my 30 eighth graders. And our mission greets me with clarity and unvarnished truth. Taking attendance, teaching a lesson, and assessing progress does that to you.

And so I would propose something many might consider radical. But I am morally obligated to speak my truth. That is ...I don’t think last year’s cuts to specialists in OOD and other offices were aligned with Goal 4. Don’t get me wrong – I get that at times we’re obligated to make cuts. But here’s what I would propose – provide people with the opportunity to work directly with children every day – to teach. Rather than transfer one person to a school site, break that position into 2-3 parts, where 2-3 people might teach part of the day and work as central services staff the rest of the day. It is a different mental model – one that respects the work of every employee and each position, and integrates us a system – it helps to make a culture of “we” – not of us vs. them.

I understand significant work is done every day by central services staff and by teachers, and I also understand that tough economic times can provide us with opportunities to re-examine the way we do business. When the economy hands you lemons, you make lemonade. Thank you very much.