

HOPE 2.0

January 5, 2018

HOPE for the Elephant in the Room

I am known among my family and friends as the person who “rips the bandage off” of the most sensitive of circumstances, circumstances considered by most as *the elephant in the room*. It may have been the doses of reality that my mother served regularly and generously that nurtured this character trait. Whatever the source, I cannot deny its existence: I acknowledge the elephants.

Discipline is a major elephant that tramples every facet of our district, but is also *the* most complex to address. Consider these perspectives:

- Students have no respect for teachers and other adults
- Teachers have no regard for how student backgrounds, life experiences and cultures impact learning
- Administrators do not support teachers in their handling of discipline
- If lessons were more engaging, students would be less likely to misbehave
- Parents do not hold their children accountable
- Administrators have forgotten what it is like to be a teacher
- Administrators do not communicate with teachers frequently and consistently enough regarding disciplinary expectations and outcomes
- Teachers need better classroom management
- Discipline should be levied consistently, no matter what. *Equality* across the board
- Discipline should be levied based on student circumstances and needs, no matter what. *Equity* across the board
- Discipline is a teacher issue
- Discipline is an administrative issue
- Discipline is a parent issue

What sane person would want to acknowledge *this* age-old, challenging and down-right cantankerous elephant? Take a guess.

On January 11, 2018 all of our HOPE Teams (see HOPE Note from 09/29/17), along with a few invited guests will convene the first of a host of meetings to conduct a labor-intensive root-cause analysis that will identify why this elephant exists; why it persists; and, what we **must** do in order to address it in our district. Teachers, administrators, parents, board members, law enforcement, community members, and representatives from PaTTAN will be in attendance.

There is no magic bullet. This meeting will be the start of a multi-year process to address discipline systematically and strategically by making it a major initiative within our strategic planning process. The issue will not be remedied overnight. Addressing this elephant will require courageous conversations, self-reflection, ownership, empathy, humility, collaboration, genuine partnership, and even forgiveness. Most of all, it will require a great deal of very hard work, but I believe that we will drastically improve our district on multiple fronts if we address the issue head-on.

So, there is HOPE for this elephant in our room. Even if you are not at the table on January 11th, you will be a part of this process, because this effort will require all hands on deck. Get ready for the paradigm shift!

Have a wonderful weekend and stay warm!

Tamara Willis, Ph.D.

Superintendent

Piece of the Puzzle



Please join me in thanking Team Voyager for spearheading the 3rd Annual Food Drive at the Middle School. Sue Kelly, John Frantz, Kate Searfoss, Drew Locust and Stephanie Rowe helped to raise over 1,500 pounds of food in December to support needy families in the area. They even challenged district office staff to collect food items for the drive. Their efforts demonstrated to students and to our community that Susquehanna Township School District cares about each other and its neighbors. We appreciate this labor of love.