

# Friday Reflection

September 11, 2020

It is pretty difficult for any American who was paying attention on September 11, 2001 to forget this day. Like many, I can remember my exact location upon hearing the news of terrible events occurring primarily in New York. I was serving as a TOSA (Teacher on Special Assignment) at the time at district offices in Elgin, IL. Someone said to turn on a TV, and I sat with other employees watching one of the two Trade Center buildings spew smoke and flames. As terrible as the sight was in the moments, we had no idea another plane would crash into the other tower, and then later both would fall to a pile of rubble. It was shocking, disturbing and saddening.

What I also remember about the days that followed was how life seemed to slow down and even stop for a bit. People were more reflective. Priorities were readjusted and communities seemed to pull together. It was a difficult time, but it was also a defining time for our country in many ways.

Fast forward to our current situation and I see some parallels. While the pandemic didn't have a clear start date, March 13 proved to be a significant marker being our last day of school in what has now become a six month ordeal. It felt like life slowed again for a bit. People were more reflective. Priorities were adjusted and communities pulled together, especially our Tustin High School community. It has been a difficult time, and I am still holding out this time will be a positively defining time for our country.

This was a significant week for our Tiller community for adjusting to our current situation and preparing for the days ahead. Teachers engaged in a professional development day to learn and set up technology to deal with live and virtual students at the same time. It has been impressive to see the problem-solving and peer support among our teachers to figure out their best way of conducting class starting the 29<sup>th</sup> of September.

Wednesday morning is our weekly professional development time, and our focus was communicating to teachers and staff the safety plans for keeping everyone safe and protected from any potential virus spread. (Parent and student communication is coming soon) Like the days after 9/11, our world feels altered and different. What was "normal" is a past memory. In our world today, navigating an airport has completely shifted our concept of normal after 9/11. I am sure there will be aspects of our world moving forward that will make our old "normal" obsolete related to COVID.

However, there are core values and certain aspects of our lives that will remain foundational. For Tustin High School, we are committed to our vision and mission of valuing diversity, providing rigorous learning opportunities, incorporating 21st century core competencies in order to develop skills necessary to make sure our students are prepared moving forward.

Dr. Jon Tuin

Tustin High School Principal

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No where was that more evident than in classrooms I visited yesterday. From a Physics class where students were learning the intricacies of the relationships among acceleration, force and resistance as expressed in complex formulas to an English class where power dynamics of a Puritan society from long ago were analyzed and dissected in order to better understand both the story and our current world, our teachers and students were engaged in fulfilling our mission and vision.

Yes, this current mode of learning has been challenging and even frustrating at times, but it is inspiring to watch our community come together to make it work. Yesterday, I watched numerous teachers conducting lessons and students engaging at an impressive level. I think for the first time, it feels like some rhythm has been established and productive learning is taking root. I know it isn't perfect, but my overall sense is people are coming together to make it work.

Another important aspect of the work took the form of home visits. Our assistant principal, Michelle Everitt took one of our counselors, Veronica Williams and conducted a full day of home visits. This is part of our process for following up with students not engaged over multiple days. Listening to the extent these Tiller employees went through to track down students and support their ability to access classes was touching and inspiring. It is easy sometimes to assume that students are willfully not attending, but reports of home visits are good reminders that usually there are pretty good underlying reasons why students are not engaged. Fortunately, sometimes the "fix" is rather simple like teaching or providing some aspect of technology. Other times it is more complex, but in either case, some students and families learned this week there are many adults in our school who care about their well-being and progress.

As we reflect on 9/11, may we be reminded of the importance of working together to pick up the pieces and create something positive out of difficult situations. I see us doing that now in our pandemic time. I do look forward to a day when COVID is not so prominent in our considerations, but I also realize the goal is not to go back. Rather, the goal is to continue moving forward in a productive way that betters us all. It will continue to take hard work and effort, and I know we will continue to pull together as a Tustin community to prevail.

Go Tillers!

Dr. Jon Tuin

Tustin High School Principal