



Update from the Superintendent

To: Parents and Guardians
From: Bill Husfelt, Superintendent
Date: February 14, 2021

I try not to spend a lot of time on social media these days ... with 11 grandchildren in three different locations I'm really just on Facebook for the cute photos of my grandkids. I don't understand the complicated algorithms but I'm very grateful that almost everything on my personal newsfeed is positive. I don't however, as a matter of business practice and in adherence to Florida's broad public records law, correspond about school district business with anyone on my personal page or in my personal messages. My BDS email is the right place for those conversations and virtually all of our district correspondence is public record to some degree.

But back to social media. I am becoming increasingly more and more alarmed, however, that social media is becoming a 24-7 living and breathing virtual "executioner" for some and I'm sad for what that means for our society, our community and our children.

In the "good old days," people were innocent until proven guilty, people waited to find out "the rest of the story" from the source before believing every accusation and differences were settled as a result of calm, respectful conversations that occurred in person or on the phone.

Today, anyone can be a "keyboard warrior" and can "rally the troops" for a cause before all of the facts are known and that, to be candid, hurts my heart because innocent people are often caught up in the fray. While we all grew up with the adage "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me," the truth is that words do hurt, things said cannot be unsaid, posts shared cannot be unshared and social media can be quite a negative influence on lives.

So, I'm here to advocate for another approach.

What if we all just tried to be "kind" first and "right or righteous" second? I know of a carpenter who did exactly that. Our world is a crazy place and the pandemic has just made it even more so. More people than ever before are carrying heavy, often unseen, burdens and many of our friends, neighbors and colleagues are dealing with serious financial, emotional and physical worries as a result of this pandemic.

So, what if we all just tried to be a little kinder to each other? I know there are legitimate concerns and things that need to be shared and addressed and I'm not discounting those. I'm

not saying that kindness can excuse bad behavior or that concerns are not legitimate. But I am wondering how our collective lives might change if we were a little slower to allow the court of social media to convict someone before all of the facts are known and how things might change if we all consciously tried to be kinder?

To be candid, I'm an adult and I have a fervent belief in the power of prayer and in my role on this earthly planet. My vision of Heaven is totally the opposite of this world. I can take criticism, I can take rude behavior and I can take the negativity that comes along with public office ... it's basically expected in public life and is part of the package. However, there are others who cannot withstand unceasing negativity and I know plenty of good people (who pour their hearts and souls into their jobs and their communities) who are getting weary and who feel defeated.

I am not someone who "worries" per se, I believe what's supposed to happen will happen, BUT I am concerned for our children. Our students look to us so they can learn about problem solving, about disagreements and about conflict resolution. But, what are they really seeing if they peruse social media, watch the news or listen to some of the adults in their lives?

I am concerned that many of our children are getting a skewed view of conflict resolution and that's both sad and alarming.

I encourage everyone to communicate first with kindness, empathy and understanding in person, on the phone, via email and on social media. Social media is an incredible tool when used for good and we have seen so many instances of that in Bay District Schools. Just a couple of weeks ago, Waller Elementary School's new music teacher shared that he was looking for donations of large, plastic buckets that can be turned upside down and used as drums. We shared that post on our BDS FB page and in less than a day someone who had a connection to Home Depot on 23rd Street saw the post and reached out. By the weekend, Home Depot had graciously donated an entire class set of the buckets.

These are the good things, the reasons and ways in which we are connected via the new thread of social media and I will be eternally grateful to those who see needs and step up. Social media also allows us unparalleled opportunities to share information. Our own BDS FB page has grown in three years from 3,000 followers to more than 24,000 followers which means we are able to communicate regularly with so many community stakeholders. But, then again, I continue to be shocked when an emergency happens with a student and we discover that the parents/guardians have not provided us with working phone numbers or email addresses. Recently, I saw a FB meme encouraging parents to "check your child's grades as often as you check social media" and I just have to wonder about where we are as a society when that message is really a salient one?

But, as previously noted, there are many reasons not to love social media or the ease with which some people take to email to voice their concerns. I've been called just about every name you can think of in emails but in most cases, there's so much more to the story than the writer knows or understands and usually we can come to a very peaceful resolution once the facts are known.

For the past couple of years we've encouraged our students to #ChooseKind when it comes to their interactions with each other and I hope that we, as a community, can do the same. In a

world fraught with obstacles, challenges and difficulties, a little kindness can truly go a long, long way.

Stay safe and God Bless!