

"Everyone who remembers his own education remembers teachers; not methods, curriculum or techniques..."

Sidney Hook

# Grey Matters

Volume 1

Week of September 3 - 5, 2003

Number 1

Finally, the students are coming back today! While I have enjoyed meeting with parents/guardians, faculty, and staff this summer, I've been itching to have the halls crawling with students for weeks now. It's just too quiet without them in the building. Simply put, I'm so excited that this day is finally here! I know you too are experiencing this enjoyment, but perhaps you are exhibiting this exhilaration in different ways...feel free to haul off and give me a dope slap when you see me if it seems like the right thing to do...

Because communications is one of my priorities, I am sending you the first edition of my own principal's newsletter. My plan is to distribute this newsletter every Monday morning. In the event you doubt my longevity for such a venture, I'll have you know that I distributed a newsletter for the last four years (*The Riley House News*, at Newton North High School, and *The Northern Mumble*, at King Philip).

But first, a few caveats. I was not an English major, and my punctuation, grammar, and spelling are sometimes less than impressive (did I mention that my 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher gave up on my spelling skills saying, "It is clear to me that you will never learn this material. You're going to have difficult life young man." God bless the creators of the computer spell check and the efforts of my wife for helping me sound coherent!!). I tend to write in a conversational style and I don't think up what I'm going to write about until I sit down at my computer sometime on Sunday. Sometimes I finish VERY late - or early - Monday mornings. So please forgive my disjointed syntax, lax proofreading, and error-prone products. My fingers try to keep up on the keyboard with the thoughts that tumble out of my head but sometimes I just can't get it right. Please bear with me.

As we all know, there are always issues and ideas about the school that people talk about in the hallways, on the sidelines of the soccer field, or just think about in the back of their minds. The problem is that quite often these issues go no further than the level of isolated conversations. A former colleague taught me the importance of "turning the lights on" to these issues. For good or for bad, bringing these issues to the light of day allows for a broader discussion and hopefully, results. This is where *Grey Matters* comes in. My intention here is to put in print what most people would only mumble. That is, to put the issues I am thinking about or have heard about out on the table to all of you directly, without the opportunity to be misquoted or misinterpreted because I was mumbling, something which is pretty common for me. Oh, and by the way, just so you're aware, I also intend to e-mail this to parents/guardians. And yes, I've done that all along too.

I've found such regular correspondence with teachers and parents to be remarkably connective. I'm EXTREMELY interested in what you're thinking and encourage you to respond to what I say. I would much rather have a cup of coffee and discuss things with each of you in person, but we all know that's not going to happen on a regular basis. So, if nothing else, this will let you know what's on my mind. I hope you take the time to send me an email when you feel so moved and ask me to come see you when it's needed.

In the past my ramblings have been about educational issues at the building, city, regional, state, and national level. I might talk about my family, the Patriots or the Bears, or maybe politics or music, or anything else that pops into my head. Sometimes I'll send out statistics that I find intriguing. Regardless of what comes out, I hope you'll find it connecting with me in some abstract way. Until we find the time for that cup of coffee and conversation together, alas, this will have to do.

Did any of you ever think about being a principal? About 15 years ago, I remember my mother (who was a high school Art teacher) asked me if I'd thought about becoming a principal. I think my response was something about putting a tube of Crest to my head before I'd become one of *them!* She laughed for a long time when I entered administration and never let me forget my earlier comment. While I have "officially" been out of the classroom for a couple years, I still think of myself as a teacher and still crave that interaction with kids. I will need to poke my head into classrooms just to see wide-eyed students riveted on a teacher again. You know "the look". That look the whole class gets when you say or do something that REALLY gets their attention? So much so that you don't even have to check to see if they're paying attention, because it's so quiet you feel like to whole world is watching your every move? And they're hanging on every word you say? THAT'S when you've got 'em! You know you don't really hook them all day every day, but when you hit those moments you realize how important what you say really is. That's the "teachable moment". I miss that.

So remember, if I poke my head into your class someday, it'll probably be because I need to get away from the adults and back to where I really feel at home – in the classroom. And if I hang around for a few minutes, it's not necessarily because I'm suspicious. It's probably because I sense some students getting to that "teachable moment" phase. Let's face it folks; it doesn't happen all that much, so when you suspect your class will experience it – let me know in advance. I want to be there to watch it happen.

Let's be clear about one thing, there will be plenty of stress on the first day, which is most likely today as you read this. Some form will be missing; a new procedure will be confusing, a set of directions will be wrong. But I trust that within a few weeks things will be humming along, and I know you'll all do a superb job, as always. I just thank my lucky stars that I've been given this opportunity to work with such a dynamic faculty and staff. I've been in places where it's A LOT worse, and we need to keep things in perspective over the first few days. Cheer up. Things will work out. Don't sweat the little stuff. Focus on your kids and your curriculum and methods, and serving each child in the best way you can.

Remember that all the anxiety of the first days disappears as soon as the students arrive. The kids really center me. They remind me why we're all in this business – the business of teaching. It's all about molding young adults and contributing one tiny piece to their unfolding view of the world. Just think about that for a second. You're about to get the opportunity to shape the lives of over one hundred eager, young, impressionable adolescents. Whatever experiences you impart to them will stay with them for the rest of their lives. Each one of them is a unique entity which you have the profound opportunity to influence in a positive way. Ask them about their plans for the future. Ask them about their dreams. Get to know them on their terms. You'll be amazed at what any kid can do. They are boundless and far-reaching if they are given the right environment.

So, remember to focus on what's important: The students; YOUR students; OUR students. Join with me and go make an impact on one of them today. And tomorrow. And every day. You have NO IDEA how much your actions influence everyone around you. Just leave 'em stunned and itching to get back to your class the next time it meets.

..... It's gonna be a great year!