REFLECTIONS AND RAMBLINGS FROM THE TEACHERS’ LOUNGE

By Cathy Burden

As National Board Certified Teachers, we have reflected until the cows eventually came home. It’s something we do every day on the drive home from school when our minds aren’t yet occupied by supper, laundry, grading papers, our family’s schedule, and unwatched episodes of NCIS (I still can’t believe Tony DiNozzo is leaving). Everyone reflects to one degree or another, but NBCTs understand how reflection enhances our classroom work on a daily basis.

As my CTEPS project comes to a close, I’ve reflected on a multitude of questions about how well (or not) my work was conducted. I’m one of those people who generally feel that I can always do better. I don’t beat myself up about it, but I think it helps me look down the road and visualize improvements. As a teacher going into retirement, I thought I had an idea of what my last year would look like. I was wrong. Part of the reason my vision was blurred revolved around CTEPS (an awesome opportunity) and part centered on a romanticized idea of what my days would be like after I finally decided this was my last year of teaching (the work keeps going until the last day, people – be forewarned).

I wish CTEPS had come into my teaching career a few years ago. I think about all of the great programs I would have loved to join (like our superstars Angie Gunter and Lauren Hill) and the progress I could have made on behalf of my students, kids with disabilities who would have benefitted from an increased awareness and participation on my part in work like CTEPS and beyond. *If only . . .*

If I had started this project earlier, I could have joined forces with fellow teachers across the district and the state to make positive differences in the lives of high school students with disabilities. Someone on my team, who would be more computer savvy and perhaps a little bit less of a procrastinator than the genius behind the scenes, would have figured out a method to feed our monitoring into the Infinite Campus portal and all of my scraps of paper and verbal reports from teachers in the hallway would be unnecessary (although I do love hearing good reports from my fellow teachers about our shared students). If I could bottle my excitement for helping kids succeed at the level of their same-age peers, I could sell that stuff on “Teachers Pay Teachers” and forget about the lottery!

As it stands, I have monitoring data for several of my advocates but only three of them with any substance. Since school began, I have lost three sophomores to another school and one to truancy (her records are incomplete because of so many missed days of school). I continue to battle with and for a male sophomore who is determined to get suspended, add days to his in-school suspension record, and/or fail two graduation requirements. Even with all of the aforementioned difficulties and the lack of a mother at home, this kid is trying to enroll at the local community/technical college as a junior so he can realize his dream of becoming a welder. My work as a champion of self-advocacy pales in comparison to the realities of his daily life, but I’ve tried to impress upon him that my goals correlate with his dreams. And the beat goes on . . .

My product seems incomplete, but my plan is still alive. I have ideas and data to share with my colleagues in the special education department here at school, and I hope they will welcome me back (once KTRS says I can legally visit) to hear additional ideas about self-advocacy. I would love to work with the department as a consultant – one who doesn’t have to worry about lesson planning, grading, or IEP deadlines, but rather as a teacher who has the knowledge and experience to share with educators still in the classroom.

Thank you, my fellow CTEPS conspirators, for your support, your enthusiasm, and your unwavering congeniality. I can’t imagine a world in education without teachers like YOU.

