

Superintendent Update: December 7, 2018

Quote for the week: "Think twice before you speak, because your words and influence will plant the seed of either success or failure in the mind of another."—Napoleon Hill

There are lots of reasons to stop before you spew. Here are five:

1. Words have power. People are pretty careless with the words they choose.

Especially when speaking. Learn to choose your words carefully to avoid hurting others or being misrepresented by what you did say.

2. Your words will define who you are and who you are not. Take note of the circumstances when what you say is not what you, upon reflection, would have wanted to say. Does it happen mostly with one particular person or a particular group of people or just groups in general? Is it most often in arguments or debates? Is it when you're "on the spot" and pressed to supply information? Try to find a pattern. It might be helpful to start a [journal](#) of events so you can compare these at your leisure.

3. Your words can help and they can hurt. Formulate responses: Not just one, but consider your options. There are many different ways to say things. and your goal here is to find the best way to convey what you want to say in a way that has a positive impact. Communication is primarily a function of the recipient so you have to communicate based on the listener.

4. Your choice of words are signs of your intelligence or your ignorance. Be thoughtful about your tone: How you say it is, in many ways, as important as what you say. Tone of voice can convey enthusiasm and sincerity, or it can rebuff and show sarcasm, and as most people have experienced, what we say can be taken in the wrong way. The most likely reason is that the tone of voice, what was said, body and facial language, as well as content, were not all thoughtfully combined to integrate with the listener's most effective method of communication.

5. You can no longer hide from your words or the truth of who you are. Contrary to what many, especially those in the public spotlight, don't seem to realize, once the words are out of your mouth, no amount of apologizing will put them back in. While you're talking, consider what you're saying and keep a close watch on the reactions as they emerge. After the conversation is over, review the whole process again in your

mind and note what you might have done differently and why. This is an ongoing process. Over time, you will refine and improve – you will become a better communicator and people will accept your responses with a more open mind.

News for the week:

Mrs. Battles and Mrs. Montgomery achieved National Board Certification recently. We are so proud of them and the commitment it took to be successful. I am hopeful many of our teachers will become a part of this process at some point. Congratulations Mrs. Battles and Mrs. Montgomery!



THE FOUR BEASTS OF NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFICATION (COPIED AND PARAPHRASED)

Without a doubt, earning National Board Certification requires serious immersion in best practices for your content area. But being well-versed in good teaching isn't enough to get you all the way there. Because what's really being tested is your ability to fight four massive, intangible beasts that come after you again and again throughout the process. If someone is able to prevail against these four, they're well within their rights to do a bit of chest-beating when it's all over.

THE BEAST OF LOGISTICS

Assembling your portfolio requires obsessive attention to detail. The instructions contain page after page of specs that address everything from font size to page length to how much you should enlarge your driver's license when photocopying it. There are dozens of cover sheets. Dozens of forms to be signed. And everywhere, *everywhere*, this panic-inducing message: *If any of these components are missing or incorrect, your entry will not be scored.*

The time it takes to comb through these details may actually exceed the time one spends planning and teaching the lessons themselves. *What does any of this have to do with teaching?*

I'll tell you what it has to do with teaching: Teachers have to pay attention to details. Teaching is not comprised entirely of floating into classrooms, emitting bursts of Rain Man-like brilliance, and floating away again. We have to align our lessons with standards, complete IEPs and gifted service plans, and make sure our credentials are up to date. We need to read about new strategies, keep up with advancements in our field, learn new technologies, and pursue graduate studies. A gifted actor still has to be counted on to learn his lines and show up on time for shoots. A gifted

surgeon still needs to follow hospital procedure. Any principal will tell you that a teacher who isn't able to consistently read and follow instructions is a constant headache. If we are going to call ourselves professionals, details have to matter.

What helps one fight this particular beast is joining a support group, led by experienced NBCTs. In monthly meetings, teachers read and re-read the instructions, discovering the minutiae that could sink them if they aren't careful. Without this group effort, many surely would have missed something. Just don't try to do it all by yourself.

THE BEAST OF PROCRASTINATION

Because certification is self-guided, candidates have to plan and stick to regular periods of work. I'm sure there are some people who manage to pull together everything they need at the last minute, but they are the exception.

This beast is the one that sets National Board Certification apart from graduate degrees. In most graduate programs, students have regular assignments, meetings, and other deadlines that force them to keep up a steady stream of work. Someone who has earned their NBCT did not necessarily have any of that structure, so the credential tells you they were somehow able to manage their time well enough to get everything done, and done well.

A support group is key to meeting this challenge. Mentors set "suggested" deadlines for bringing in drafts of our entries – failure to do so has no consequence, but one would miss the opportunity for feedback and would fall behind in not keeping up. This process can easily be replicated in a smaller group, or even on your own:

However you do it, setting mini-deadlines along the way will get you to the end in one piece.

THE BEAST OF HOLDUPS, DELAYS AND SETBACKS

Pursuing National Board Certification forces you to keep going long after you think you've had enough. Things will go wrong: Cameras will record without sound. Lessons will flop. Students whose work you planned to use will move halfway through the year. You will get sick. Snow days will happen. Setbacks like these will discourage some candidates to the point where they just can't keep going. If you can, you're demonstrating a tenacity that sets you apart.

This tenacity becomes especially critical if you don't certify the first time around. Many candidates do not earn high enough scores to certify in their first year of candidacy. Once they receive this news, they must choose which items to do a second time around – often a combination of some portfolio entries and portions of the written exam. You can “bank” the scores you'd like to keep, then re-do others for a higher score. Sounds simple, but the inner strength it takes to get back on that horse after so much disappointment is incredible. Some think it's a negative thing to certify in your second or third year; I say those are the people to admire more, because they didn't give up.

The key to beating this beast is simply knowing it's there. Just be ready for it. Plan for things to go wrong. Do a lot of trial runs. Consider the first lesson you record to be the first of many. Go into the process fully expecting that you'll have to re-do some things...

Which brings me to the last beast, the biggest and fiercest one of all.

THE BEAST OF EGO

Among certification materials is an 80-page booklet of standards that is used to score work. These standards are scary. The more one reads, the more one might think: *I don't do that. I don't do that. Not that either. Who does all that?*

Here's an example; just one section of one of my sixteen standards: *Accomplished teachers facilitate classroom conversation. In these teachers' classrooms, students can be found engaging in exploratory conversations about texts. Students pay attention to one another's comments about texts, ask each other questions, challenge one another, defend their individual opinions, and work cooperatively toward reaching consensus or clarifying and understanding differing perspectives about matters of urgency to them and their peers.*

It sounds like heaven. And nothing like many classes.

Every standard read could make one feel more and more incompetent.

There's just so much! They seem impossible! You just start!

Instead of turning the anxiety on the standards themselves, dismissing them as unrealistic, just recognize their value. And after wallowing in self-pity because the standards are too hard, get motivated by their near-impossibility. Standards must be high! What is the alternative? Standards that basically say, *Just do what you think is best, and that'll be good? You're perfect no matter what?* Not really. There's a reason you get half a year to assemble

your portfolio: Pulling together your very best work takes a LOT of time.

Another cause for despair is the word EVIDENCE. It keeps turning up. In every portfolio entry, one will be asked to point to evidence of student learning.

Evidence? I beg your pardon? Is it not enough to teach with supreme energy and grace?

Here is one example of evidence: One will probably have to show evidence such as conducting a whole-class discussion. One might think they have really done a good job. But then, in a written analysis, one may have to point to specific instances in the video where student learning was evident. And, well...could you do it? Kids may participate, but do the things they say actually demonstrate that they are reaching the stated objective for the discussion?

When one can't point to evidence, a "re do" is probably in order. Getting over your own ego is most definitely the biggest challenge of National Board Certification. And it's the one that makes the biggest difference, too. Because pursuing certification isn't really about proving what a great teacher you already are; it merely shows you the path to greatness. If you're able to drop your defenses, set your ego aside and take some good, heavy steps on that path, then...*then* you've earned the right to put the NBCT after your name.

A FIGHT WORTH FIGHTING

Certification did not make anyone a flawless teacher. What it will do is give one a process for making sense of the times when things

go wrong. And the *urge* to make sense of them. And the belief that it's my *responsibility* to make sense of them.

And that's it right there, the reason it was worth it: Above all else, certification makes one believe the buck stops with me. If my students don't learn, it's on me. Even if they come from chaotic environments – it's on me to figure out how to reach them. Even if they are chronic absentees – it's on me to connect with their families and help them devise a plan to improve attendance. Even if I have limited supplies. It's on me. If the air conditioning goes out, if the Internet is down, it's on me to improvise, to model good character, to lead. Throw bad policy at me — I'll find a way to teach my students anyway. I know what I need to do. *I am the teacher. I am the professional.* It's on me.

More Awards for Pleasant View Campus:

Dear Principal Fisher and Superintendent Myers,

Congratulations! **Pleasant View Campus** has been recognized by the [Office for Education Policy \(OEP\)](#) at the University of Arkansas as a school that is Beating the Odds, because students demonstrated high growth on the ACT Aspire even though the school serves a high percentage of students who participate in Free and Reduced Lunch! As you may know, the OEP creates an annual report entitled the Outstanding Educational Performance Awards, and this year we are recognizing schools with high student growth. We think growth is the best indicator of the positive impact that your school is having on students.

In our [Beating the Odds](#) report to be released tomorrow, Pleasant View Campus received the following awards:

Statewide "Beating the Odds" Overall Growth: Middle Level

Statewide "Beating the Odds" ELA Growth: Middle Level

"Beating the Odds" ELA Growth: Middle Level (Northwest Region)

We provide specific content-area badges for placement on your school's website (attached), and a personalized paper award will be sent to the district later this school year.

Awards are based on the 2018 content growth score calculated by the Arkansas Department of Education. These growth scores reflect how much students at the school improved from 2017 compared to how much they were expected to grow considering prior achievement. We recognize schools based on Overall growth, as well as for growth in Math and English Language Arts separately. To learn more about how we determined the OEP award winners and to see the full list of award recipients, you can view the report [here](#).

We congratulate you on this accomplishment and hope that you will share this good news with teachers, students, and others who contributed to your school's success

Beating the Odds: ELA ACT Aspire, 2018 Table 75: Top 10 "High-Poverty" Middle Schools in Arkansas
based on ACT Aspire ELA Growth School (District) Region Grades Served, % FRL , # of Test Takers
Combined Content Growth Score

1 Pleasant View Campus (Mulberry/Pleasant View BiCounty Schools) NW 5-8 77% 96 81.05 2 Oak Grove Middle (Paragould) NE 5-6 76% 416 85.60 3 Dora Kimmons Jr. High (Fort Smith) NW 7-9 94% 727 79.65 4 Beryl Henry Upper Elementary (Hope) SW 5-6 89% 234 82.80 5 Cedarville Middle (Cedarville) NW 5-8 73% 225 85.25 6 Butterfield Trail Middle (Van Buren) NW 6-8 70% 611 84.20 7 J. O. Kelly Middle (Springdale) NW 6-7 89% 713 83.85 8 William O. Darby Jr. High (Fort Smith) NW 7-9 93% 579 81.75 9 Imboden Area Charter (Imboden Charter) NE K-8 77% 37 79.65 10 Waldron Middle (Waldron) NW 5-8 73% 431 79.3

Abbey Childers: Abbey received 2nd Place in the Patriot's Pen essay contest! Congratulations to Abbey!

