

Foundations of a School System – The Army Marches on Its Stomach

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Before I became an administrator, I simply had no idea there was an entire army of people employed by a school district to ensure the day-to-day functioning of the school took place in a manner that made a difference to the educational experiences of her students. I am not a TOTAL idiot, so I knew there were other people involved in the schooling experience besides teachers and administrators. I mean I knew there were plenty of people in the school building doing all sorts of work besides conducting a class, but I just didn't think beyond all of that to the very infra-structure of the school. Now, I know MUCH better. There are several divisions of people all working to support the educational experiences of our students, and the truth of the matter is too many people (including me, formerly) just don't think about the essential work these people address.

Along with the people in a school system who work one-on-one with the students' academic needs, there are a variety of departments that do their part. Trust me when I say if we didn't have these other divisions and the wonderful people who work in them, we would be hard pressed to provide the students with the learning opportunities they deserve. Bottom dollar they are the foundation for what we do in the classroom. In no particular order, the "other" divisions of a school system include the administrative staff, health services, food service, para educators/aides, transportation, grounds, maintenance, custodial, technology, and the central office staff members. Just think about it, without these areas of work, we would be wandering around lost not knowing where we are to be going in darkened, messy buildings hungry and cold... Okay, maybe it wouldn't be the dystopian landscape I am describing, but it would NOT be an environment conducive to the educational setting.

Pardon me for one minute as I slip on my "education nerd" hat to explain the deeper basis of the importance of these divisions within our district. There is a theory of motivational needs called "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs" that basically says a person's ability to grow emotionally and intellectually depends on that person feeling safe and secure. There are five stages to this theoretical system, beginning with Physiological needs, then Safety needs, then Belongingness and love needs, then Esteem needs, and finally ending with Self-actualization (this is where a person achieves his full potential). As an educator, I happen to prescribe to this theoretical approach to life and go about working privately and professionally to structure my environment in a way that allows a person (or me) to reach the level of Self-actualization. This is the very reason why I honor these other foundational

divisions of a school system so much. Without their hard works, it simply would not be possible to help our students reach the point where they are able to move beyond our school walls in a manner that befits them.

Napoleon once said, “The army marches on its stomach.” This erstwhile leader was recognizing the importance of ensuring the army is well fed as it marches into battle, something most people simply don’t consider when thinking of a conquering army. I broaden this saying as a metaphor to relate to the importance of considering the details of whatever we are addressing, be it transportation, food, technology... This harkens back to the very reason why I am spending time writing about these foundational divisions of the school system. Without the fine folk working to ensure the system is up and functioning, many, many details would not be addressed and that would DEFINITELY negatively impact our students as they matriculate through our system. I am just glad that I eventually grew to the place where I recognized all of this as I work hard to support and champion these divisions of the district, and I invite all five of my readers J to do the same.