

MONDAY MESSAGE

FROM DR. MCFARLAND



Put Your Blinders On!

January 29, 2018

The start of a new year is always a fun time of the year for me. The change in the weather signals the start of the horse racing schedule in East Texas. Growing up, we would travel every year to the African-American cowboy rodeo in Longview, followed by the horse races at the Mauldin Track in the backwoods of Chapel Hill outside of Tyler.

This was always exciting for me because I loved to watch my uncle, John Earl, ride his black stallion we called Big Mac. Big Mac was a tall, pretty black stallion that would only let my uncle get on him. He had a reputation of being the craziest and fastest horse from Southeast Texas, and when he ran, there were always big crowds and many side bets being placed.

One of the last races I remember attending with my uncle was when he was preparing to race Big Mac. There was a lot of excitement buzzing around the track and the stakes were high. The winner would win four head of cattle, two horses and a trailer. My uncle prepared for this race with a level of focus and intensity that I had not seen before.

A month before the race, we drove to Fort Worth from Jasper to purchase some horse blinders. I remember seeing these blinders on other horses, but my uncle had never used blinders on Big Mac. I asked him why he was using them, and he told me, "When you are preparing for a big race, you have to leave no stone unturned. The stakes will be high in this race. There will be a lot of distractions, and I need to keep Big Mac disciplined and focused on the path in front of him. These blinders will block out the distraction and the noise to keep him focused so we can win the race."

My uncle was right. The blinders helped Big Mac stay focused and he won the race. My uncle gave me one of the horses he won, and I named her Sugar, because the victory was so sweet. By helping him train for the race, I learned the importance of preparing with intensity, taking care of the little things and staying focused to win the race.



As I think about where we are in the school year and where we are as a district, I am reminded of the need to stay focused on the work that is before us. During this time of year, it is natural to get distracted, overwhelmed and frustrated that things may not be progressing at the rate at which you expected. Realize that all these feelings are normal, and I encourage you to push through them. Be fanatical about following the plans that we have laid out. Realize that the common assessment scores and others are where we are today, but they are not where we will end up if we continue to stay focused and act with intention.

Focus and discipline are critical during this time of the year, and it is important that we are using every instructional minute available to get the most out of our students. Our blinders should be on. We should have a laser-like focus on student learning and modify our instruction to meet the needs of the students we are serving. It is obvious that many of our students are in need of intense interventions, and all should be receiving good quality tier 1 instruction in the classroom.

The sacrifices you are making today as you are preparing and planning your lessons will result in higher levels of learning for your students in the future. **The challenges are great, but the hopes, dreams and aspirations that we have for our students are greater.** The stakes are high for our students, and if they are going to win, it will be because we put our blinders on.

With something to think about, I'm Mike McFarland, reminding you to be focused, disciplined and relentless to ensure that students are learning. Crowley ISD, it is time to put your blinders on!

Dr. Michael D. McFarland
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