REFLECTIONS ON A VIRTUAL END TO THE SCHOOL YEAR, OVERCOMING ADVERSITY AND THE LSR7 SPIRIT
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LET ME START BY SAYING, ‘WHAT A YEAR…’

It has been the highest professional honor to serve our school district and community during this time and in this capacity. As I look back on the past 12 months, it is hard to fathom how much has transpired within a limited timeframe. It is critical to remember where we have been and take stock of our current circumstances as we begin to write the next chapter of our district’s story.

The school year has ended, and we are in the midst of planning for the fall, following the onset of COVID-19 and the closure of schools. There continue to be several unknowns about the Novel Coronavirus and its implications for re-opening schools. Despite the uncertainty and unknowns, when I reflect on this past semester two thoughts quickly come to mind: clarity of purpose and hope.

Effective March 16, when the district formally announced school closure during spring break, there was an instantaneous mobilization across the district to take whatever steps necessary to ensure students received the best LSR7 had to offer through a new, virtual platform. The adult community rallied to learn and understand how to support students’ needs and best deliver instruction, while not being physically present. This transition occurred with growing pains and the learning curve was tremendous, but there was an unspoken clarity of purpose that was ubiquitous. Student needs were paramount above all else.

School closure also canceled some of our public events intended to introduce our new superintendent, Dr. David Buck. However, he persevered and has engaged with LSR7 over the past several months through in-person, administrative and virtual meetings, and he has even set up his office so he is ready to go on July 1.

In our time together, Dr. Buck enters conversations with enthusiasm, positivity, and as a listener. He is someone who seeks better to understand our district, community and culture, and contributes an informed perspective as an experienced superintendent. Dr. Buck is well-respected throughout the state and has demonstrated the ability to affect change and improve the educational system for students in his current district. Those are all qualities and characteristics that give our school and broader community hope about the quality of leadership for years to come.

All superintendents must prove themselves over time, and LSR7 is fortunate to have a highly engaged community that values and expects an exemplary PK-12 education. LSR7 also has an enormous capacity for goodwill, compassion, and empathy, and I encourage all of the families to welcome our new leader and genuinely embrace him into our community.

We have an opportunity to allow Dr. Buck to learn, take risks, and lead without the past’s cynicism tarnishing our view, and allow the grace experienced through the pandemic to build momentum and usher in a new era. To do that, we will need to assume good intent and allow trust to emerge.

LSR7 is ready for its next chapter, one that honors our past and embraces a future in which we relentlessly pursue innovation and excellence for all students.

With much appreciation,

EMILY MILLER, ED.D.
INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT
EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING
MATTHEW KETTEMAN NAMED 2020 TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Mr. Ketteman learns he is Teacher of the Year during a livestreamed announcement on May 12. Flip to Page 9 to read an interview with Mr. Ketteman.

Typically, the 2020 recipients of the Lee’s Summit Chamber of Commerce Excellence In Teaching Awards are notified of this honor during surprise presentations at schools. This spring, award coordinators had to get creative. These amazing 15 educators woke up this May to a surprise celebration...in their front yards. On May 12, Matthew Ketteman, a music teacher at Longview Farm Elementary, was named the 2020 Teacher of the Year in a livestreamed announcement. Congratulations to Mr. Ketteman, and all of our talented staff members.

Ms. Nori Baker, Woodland Elementary School
Mrs. Marcella Briggs, Hawthorn Hill Elementary School
Mrs. Peggy Chandler, Summit Technology Academy
Mrs. Lara Cole, Lee’s Summit West High School
Mrs. Terry Durnell, Lee’s Summit North High School
Ms. Connie Ficken, Lee’s Summit High School
Mr. Andrew Hookie, Sunset Valley Elementary School
Mrs. April Jackson, Prairie View Elementary School
Mr. Matthew Ketteman, Longview Farm Elementary School
Ms. Niki Stanley, Pleasant Lea Middle School
Mrs. Angie Thurmond, Pleasant Lea Elementary School
Ms. Molly Williamson, Lee’s Summit Elementary School

There are also three Teacher of Distinction recipients, individuals who have previously won Excellence In Teaching and were nominated for Teacher of the Year again this year. Those award recipients are:

Mrs. Linda Driskill, Cedar Creek Elementary
Mrs. Jamie Harrel, Hawthorn Hill Elementary
Mrs. Melinda Moylan, Hazel Grove Elementary

CLASS OF 2020

David Porras, Lee’s Summit High School
"During the end of my senior year, I realized that we had looked forward to so many things to get us to this point, to get us to this diploma. Even though we missed out on most of the things we looked forward to, that does not change that fact that we all worked hard and that we made it!"
I started out in the district as a three-hour employee. At first I thought this would be a quick job. But it was rewarding to be in the kitchen and cooking and seeing the kids. It was a rewarding job, and I enjoyed being there every day. So I stuck with it.

This year I took on a managerial position. This year has been about building relationships, especially administrative relationships but still getting to stay in touch with kids.

When COVID-19 began to impact our community, I started listening. I started reading. I continued attending meetings with administration and communicating.

We also stayed calm. We didn’t want to be in a hype. We wanted to set the tone for the kids. There was never a panic. There was never a moment of thinking we wouldn’t go back.

All through spring break, the managers kept in close contact with (Nutrition Services Director Lori Danella) discussing what our meal program would look like after spring break. We emailed back and forth about volunteers and capacity.

My staff chose to come in and volunteer and it’s been great. Every day we would go in and serve, make and prep breakfast and lunch. It’s grown every day in the amount.

There are six buses we served off of. I was in charge of one of the buses. My buses alone served 535 breakfasts and lunch meals, as well as milk.

In those first couple of weeks, I saw excitement, tears of joy. I’ve never had a parent not tell me thank you. I’ve never had a kid not tell me thank you.

Sometimes I felt kind of like an ice cream truck. We had new people come every day. They’d ask, “Can I still do this?” Yes, definitely. “Are you sure?” Yes, definitely.

My fellow Nutrition Services staff members and I have a great camaraderie. We got to know each other from different kitchens. We don’t get that opportunity every day.

It’s challenging. It’s rewarding. My aunt said it can’t be that different from the cafeteria. But it’s a lot different. We never serve this many lunches in a two-hour period or from out of the back of the bus.

I’ve learned to help people with a sense of coping and their need to find stability during this time. We were there every day at the same time. It was being part of the comfort of families knowing that they had a meal. Every day.

We’re serving kids. It’s an honor. And I love it.

HEATHER STROBACH, NUTRITION SERVICES MANAGER
After schools closed, it was heart-breaking. I know how much of a family we are at Richardson. I looked at how I could stay connected with my families. I emailed. I texted. I collected shout-outs for students and staff.

At one point it had been so many weeks, and I heard from parents: We miss you guys. I coordinated a video where my four other staff and I talked about how we miss them. It was an overwhelming response from families about how much they loved it. They told us their kids have watched it three or four times.

We are still connected regardless of this pandemic. Even though we also can’t be together right now, we’re still a family and we’ll be there to support each other in any way that we can.

I do this job for the kids. They are the funniest little beings ever. From day one we talk about regardless of who you are or where you come from, we are all family. Our bond was strong even before the pandemic.

Our motto for the 2020-21 school year is #StrongBondStrongFuture. It’s taking that strong bond that I have with the kids and their families and creating that future, not just academically, but emotionally and mentally. I know that kids will have a lot of questions when they come back, and we are going to be ready to support them.

We always have a plan. We clean and disinfect our buildings, two or three times a day. The disinfecting and sanitizing for us is normal. When the pandemic started, I reinforced to our staff how important it was to maintain our normal procedures and build upon them to keep everyone safe.

Being essential is challenging. Sometimes you feel like everybody is home and I have to be here. But I feel proud of what I do. I love my job. I strive to take care of my people.

I created a pink sticky note system for staff to let me know if they had reentered their classrooms between cleanings. When I see the pink sticky note, I’d go in and clean this area again. They go home and I keep everybody safe.

I have been here so long that I get personal messages. They email. They text me. They say, “Thank you, Miss Ivette.”

I’ve learned how to give people peace. I’ve learned how to demonstrate to my staff and my building that we are safe because of the procedures that we follow. Other than that, I’m also so proud of my crew. They texted me and volunteered to go in when I needed extra help.

I’m already making a plan for when we go back so everyone can feel safe and protected.

I’m very proud of being in the R-7 School District. And I’m ready to move forward, to see the people in my building. I’m ready to get back to my routine.

“What we can glean from this situation is the knowledge that we are strong enough and resourceful enough and brave enough to face anything that life throws at us. When we learn how to take the loss of our senior spring in our stride, then we will understand how to overcome the other roadblocks and that life will put in our path, whether that be in college or in our jobs or in our families.”
Every day is different for counselors. We don’t have a classroom. And yet we work with individuals on everything from emotion regulation to navigating family changes. We do preventative work through classroom lessons and we teach as much as we can: Conflict resolution. Making healthy choices. Mental health. Emotions.

Everything we do can stop in an instant if there is a crisis. We rally around each other and we support each other.

This (the pandemic) is everyone’s crisis. No matter how prepared anyone would be, there’s still that piece where this is causing trauma for everyone.

I tell parents and students that this is a time where it’s a new experience and when we go through new experiences we have bigger feelings, and we have to give each other grace.

When you are a counselor at a school, you are on the ground taking care of kids eight hours a day. We see a lot of sad things, but we see a lot of beautiful growth.

We’re all so used to seeing kids in our buildings. When we’re not able to, it’s hard. In a way, I felt equipped for this because of the toll on everyone’s emotions... our training helps us be aware of that and respond to that.

What have I learned this spring? First and foremost it’s the need for connection. On two levels. Our own personal need for it and for our kids. When you are trying to connect with kids, relationships come first. We can achieve a decent amount virtually. But some is lost. We need relationships to do counseling.

Some of the workarounds have been aided by the district’s use of Schoology and popping into course meetings. We might read a story. We might ask them how they are doing. We might talk about how we are doing. We might talk about coping mechanisms. Through those courses, you can do break out sessions, then you are able to have more valuable, intimate conversations.

The things that the counselors do just makes me want to cry. The way that teachers and people who really love education just chase after students to help them succeed is just beyond what you would see in any other field.

We are always thinking about ways to connect with students in valuable ways, improve their self-worth and reach their full potential. This hasn’t changed that and it won’t. It’s just highlighted our need for connection.

Being in a school is a magical thing. You get to feel what’s happening. You get to feel the energy of a building and a culture that produces great learning and helping kids feel good about themselves.

I’m looking forward to being able to provide that safe space for kids again.

“I have learned so much about myself and my school community during this time of virtual learning. I have learned that we (school community) can do hard things, even the things that we did not think were possible. I have also learned that positive human connection and the fostering of relationships are able to transcend the social distancing obstacles that may be in our way.”

DAPHNE MACK, LEE’S SUMMIT ELEMENTARY COUNSELOR

CASEY BLAKEMORE, RICHARDSON SCHOOL COUNSELING
This Lee’s Summit West junior has long been captivated by 3D printing. This year, she used her talents to create personal protective equipment - ear reliefs and face shields - for health care professionals during the pandemic.

3D printing? It’s a type of additive manufacturing. There’s whole different arrays and types. Metals. Wood. Laser. Resin. The most common type is fused filament and that’s the type most people have in their household. That’s the type that I got obsessed with.

I got a 3D printer for my birthday last year, but I’ve been wanting one of my own for years.

I started a 3D printing company less than a year ago. I’m basically 3D printing fidget toys and doing some custom work. It’s called Officium Tech. During Christmas or holidays people want to have a little gift and it’s cool to make those little things, a personalized business card holder or something like that.

I stay up at night just thinking of projects and cool things to do. As soon as this pandemic started and I started to see that people were printing PPE, I thought, “Wow!” And I started to do some research for 3D models that were approved.

Initially, I was using my own money. Then I started my GoFundMe and that’s helped a lot in funding it. Filament is on a shortage right now. It’ll come back in stock and it’ll sell out in an hour. That’s the hard part right now.

I started with 100 ear reliefs; it took me four days to get everything together. The hard part about it is the initial process. You have to try different settings. You have to go through the design process.

As soon as I thought I was going to do this, I talked to Lee’s Summit Medical Center. I thought, “You know what I’m going to start there for now.” They said they’d take it. Then I made face shields for St. Luke’s East Hospital.

It’s been so nice to see that people are willing to pay attention to something and donate money because they see the cause. They see the purpose of it.

What do I want to do for a career? The more that time goes on, I get more confused because I keep finding things I like. I will probably do something in engineering. But it has to have service elements. I have to see the impact I’m making.
I was completely shocked to receive the Excellence in Teaching award. I feel lucky every day to work in this district. I’ve worked in a number of districts, and LSR7 is by far filled with the most talented people.

I grew up among teachers, my mom and other people in my family. I have an older brother with intellectual disabilities. I’ve always been around great teaching, watching my mom interact with my brother.

The thing I love about music is that it breaks down all those barriers, no matter your path or background. Everyone can connect to music in different ways.

I feel like my job is to take away fear of failure and let students know I’d rather them try and make mistakes instead of just sit and listen to me.

My job is to not necessarily make them the most proficient singers or most talented musicians but to get them excited about trying something they didn’t think they could do before. From there, I hand them off the middle school and high school teachers to really hone that craft.

Students can release stress or tension through music, art or physical activity. We’re giving students the life skills they’ll be able to use outside of their academic purpose.

During distance learning, every Friday I livestreamed on YouTube. Every show focused on a different instrument family or instrument type. I would do an experiment to talk about the science of sound, so I tried to make it STEM- (science, technology, engineering and math) friendly.

After distance learning, I don’t think any teacher thinks teaching is the same, and they probably don’t approach teaching the same. I didn’t realize how powerful our time was together.

As the head archery coach for my school, I love the inclusiveness of it. The only thing separating the categories is the age of the child. The only thing that matters is that you and your arrow are shooting at your target, and you’re trying to get the best score you can.

Thinking about my district and community involvement, I see myself investing my time and talents to encourage and uplift people. Not just kids, the community. It makes me realize I love Lee’s Summit. I want people to feel connected. I want people to feel they’re a part of this amazing town because it’s a great place to learn and grow. I’m lucky to call it home.

Annie McCord, Lee’s Summit North

“The challenge of life brings struggles, but through hard work those struggles teach us lessons. These past four years, I have grown not only as a student, but also as an athlete and person because of the work ethic my teachers, coaches, and friends have taught me. My teachers have taught me to stop not when I am tired, but when I am finished. My coaches have taught me the necessity of perseverance. My friends have taught me the importance of consistency in all that I put my mind to.”
Before the pandemic, a typical day looked like fielding help desk tickets and calls about Chromebooks, sending materials out to buildings regarding Chromebooks and resolving tech emergencies before the end of the day.

This spring, I took on managing the distribution of “loaner” devices to kids and teachers whose devices weren’t working. And I became the distributor of WiFi hotspots. We tried to get all the devices out that we can to make sure that we can make sure all the students and teachers can keep engaging.

We jumped on this right away. The week before spring break and the week of spring break was very real to all of us in Technology. We had to think outside of the box. How will we keep kids safe? How will we keep them connected? How will we support them from home?

I coordinated with the tech specialists and the parents. And twice a week I’d get all the devices ready, communicating which device goes on this bus; the parent needs to meet that bus.

I had my little blue wagon. And I wheeled my little crates full of technology to the school buses and I put them on the buses and let them know where each device needed to go out.

I have a group of friends, a group of coworkers, women who have been my support. They surprised me one day with a cape and brought me a sign to show their appreciation for supporting them and students and teachers.

It just made my day and reminded me that what I’m doing is worth something to somebody.

We were setting rules and precedents this spring. We had to come up with a way to ask a lot of questions first. Hey, can you try this first? Can we find a way to work around this? We found fixes for folks online and got people up and working when they weren’t.

This spring, I found my “adopted” work family – Transportation and Nutrition have been wonderful to me. The folks at the Warehouse have been wonderful. They are joking with me and sharing with me while they are working through their own processes to support kids. That’s been a really nice thing.

“I enjoyed handing out meals and it was good to see the students in our community. I missed seeing their smiling faces.”

- BARBARA CLOSSER,
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SUMMER CAMPS 2020
AGES 5-12

WEEK 1: MAY 28-29
What’s the Matter

WEEK 2: JUNE 1-5
Here comes the Sun: Solar

WEEK 3: JUNE 8-12
Keep on Turning: Hydroponics

WEEK 4: JUNE 15-19
Waterworks: Hydroponics

WEEK 5: JUNE 22-26
Greenhouses: Photosynthesis

WEEK 6: JUNE 29-JULY 3
Blowing in the Wind: Wind Energy

WEEK 7: JULY 6-10
Under Pressure: Weather Station

WEEK 8: JULY 13-17
It’s Electric: Electricity

WEEK 9: JULY 20-24
Stitch a Circuit: Circuitry

WEEK 10: JULY 27-31
Good Vibrations: Sound Energy

WEEK 11: AUG 3-7
Fly with Me: Aeronautics

WEEK 12: AUG 10-14
Out to Launch: Catapults

WEEK 13: AUG 17-21
Lunar Launch: Rocketry

WEEK 14: AUG 24-29
What’s the Matter: Investigating Ice

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