

One value that is especially important to me is trust. Certainly any organization benefits from having greater trust levels among its employees and with its “customers.” But for a school district it’s vitally important, for two reasons.

First, we are a large organization with nearly 1,000 employees in 13 locations. An organization of that size functions much better when people know they can trust each other. And second, we interact with 10,000 students, many of their parents and large parts of our community every day. All these groups need to know they can trust us.

I have spent a great deal of time since I became superintendent emphasizing how important trust is. I felt it was important enough to have many of our administrators spend most of a day this summer participating in a training based on the book “The Speed of Trust” by Stephen M.R. Covey. (He is the son of Stephen Covey, who wrote the hugely influential “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.”)

Covey writes that the ability to establish, grow, extend and restore trust is the “key leadership competency of the new global economy.” But what does that mean to the Fairfield School District, and the work we do every day?

It means talking straight, one of many specific behaviors cited by Covey. I can promise you that I will do that, and will set the expectation for all our employees that they do the same. Talking straight isn’t always easy, or comfortable. When one of our employees was accused of a sexual offense over the summer, we answered the questions about it fully and truthfully, while still respecting his legal rights. When a recent survey showed many of our high school students have used alcohol or drugs, we provided that information to the reporter who asked for it and answered all her questions about it.

Earlier this year, when we had preliminary testing data that indicated our district ranking might drop, we said so, right then. Of course, we were thrilled later when the final data came in and the ranking actually went up, to “excellent.” But it was my decision to “talk straight” about the data we had at that time, and not sit on news that looked bad.

Another key part of building trust is to demonstrate respect. It’s easy to do that when dealing with someone you like and admire. But the expectation I have for all employees in our school district is to show respect to every individual they come in contact with. This includes people who may disagree with us and criticize us. I expect all of our employees to be polite and professional, even if the person they’re dealing with isn’t. That’s not always easy either, but it’s the way we will do business.

I want our community to know whether it’s information about academics, finances, policies or anything else, you have the right to expect straight talk, and respectful behavior, from any employee of our district. And that I’ll be working to make sure that expectation is being met.

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