

## **This Year, I Am a Cheerleader**

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The concept of a theme is certainly not new or unique; however, the theme you choose can be invigorating for you and your school. Over my last nine years as principal, I have selected themes after reflecting upon our school culture and the changing climate surrounding education. Here are my favorites:

2008. Selecting Tigger as an image I wanted to post all over the school most likely had more to do with where I was in my career than my faculty. I was beginning my third year as principal and I was feeling disheartened by the number of challenges and problems that arrived at my door without a clear-cut solution. It then occurred to me that it was the attitude around the problem that made it so difficult to solve and not the problem itself. If we confronted every problem with over-the-top enthusiasm and joy (just like Tigger from the Winnie the Pooh stories), maybe solutions would begin to present themselves. If nothing else, I remember a lot of smiles in 2008 and faculty starting off their sharing of a possible solution to a problem by stating, "I am trying to be Tigger so here's what I think we should try."

2009. My faculty opened their Staff Conference Day folders and found a laminated picture of a jar of pickles. They may have thought my brain had turned into relish over the summer but they endured me long enough to hear the explanation that went along with the pickles. My husband was opening a Subway restaurant back in 2009 and while attending Subway University he had learned about the leadership video "Give 'em the pickle" by Bob Farrell. The basic gist was simply why hold out on giving people what they want. When you give someone what he or she wants, you may actually get what you need – such as support. In education, you may gain a partner out of a parent, supervisor or colleague by simply providing what has been asked for. Why do we hold out on things that our parents or students need in education? A child needs a do-over on an assignment; give it to him or her. A parent wants you to move their child's seat; move it. What are we gaining by holding out on things that do not disrupt the educational process for our students? If anything, we often benefit from simply giving someone what he or she feels is needed.

2011. I cannot tell a lie, I am addicted to Project Runway. I watch it every season and get joy from Tim Gunn's critiques. He's blunt when he needs to be, he gets out of the way of creative minds, and he pushes his mentees to own their designs and simply, "Make it work." Is it really that different in education? We can complain that no matter what notices we send to a family their child is still late for school each day or we can make use of every moment the child is with us and invite him or her to learn. We often do not have control of the constraints we find ourselves held by; yet, we do have control over how we accept them, bust through them or climb over them.

2013. The world of education is changing. Right now, everything seems like a variable and no constants appear to exist in the formula, so what choice do we have? We can go belly-up or we can borrow the words of Dory from Finding Nemo and “Just Keep Swimming.” In 2013, I explained how Dory’s words acted as a mantra for Nemo’s father and Dory. They sang their mantra and did not give up, which is what we need our students to do when confronted with a challenge. In connection with Dory’s words, I introduced the concept of a mantra and asked every staff member, student and parent to write one. We’ve written mantras every year since. A mantra can be used as a strategy to help us endure a challenge or reframe our state of mind. What words make a difference for you? What can you say to yourself in order to keep your mind open and ready to take on each challenge as it presents itself?

2015. This year, I am a cheerleader. In Oceanside, our Superintendent, Dr. Harrington, shared the theme for our school district, “Oceanside Schools...anchored together by purpose, passion and people.” When I reflected on the theme she shared, my attention went to the word “people” and the idea that we are different people or play different roles based on the needs of our school community. I realized that my faculty needs me to play a specific role right now. They need me to be their cheerleader. I have an amazing faculty and right now in education our educators feel under attack. They need to know I believe in them and the work they do each day. I need to throw light onto the impact they make in the lives of their students. I asked them to come to their goals conference prepared to discuss who they need to be for their students this year. Are the students in their individual classrooms in need of a gardener, Inspector Gadget, Wonder Woman or something beyond my imagination? Whoever it is that they need us to be, we need to become. We may need to be someone different for every student in that classroom, but in forming those relationships and becoming that person, I believe every teacher will feel the difference he/she is making in the life of a child.

SAANYS asked the question, “What can we bring to our school communities to energize, motivate, and inspire students, teachers, and families?” That question does not have one easy answer, but a theme at the beginning of each school year at School 4 starts us off on the right foot.

Wishing my colleagues an invigorating 2015/16 school year!  
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