Am I Valued?

What does it mean to feel valued? I am sure that if you asked fifty people, you would likely get fifty different answers. The difference in answers has a lot to do with your age, your personality, your past experiences, and your beliefs. When I set my third goal of sustaining an educational environment where staff, students, and families feel valued, I knew I was setting a lofty, but extremely important goal.

I believe that “most” of our staff, students, and families feel valued “most” of the time, but as with any important goal, we can always do better. I wish it was as easy as posting a greeter at the door who would say “Thanks for coming...we value you as an important part of the Platteville School District” every time a staff member, student, or family member came in. We have all had the experience of going through a checkout and the cashier says “Thank you for shopping at fill in the blank, we value our customers.” It doesn’t necessarily make me feel more appreciated than any other customer in any other store.

For our students, it means knowing that not only are they valued, but their unique talents and perspectives are a valuable addition to the classroom and to the school community as a whole. It means that they have friends that care about them. It means that other students, even if they are not friends, treat them with respect. It means that when someone doesn’t treat them with respect, it is noticed and every effort is made to prevent it from happening in the future. They get this sense of being valued from their teacher, other students in the school, and every other adult they encounter. Does this mean that a student can act any way they choose? No, because that would mean we don’t care enough about them or the other students to make sure everyone feels that school is a safe and respectable place of learning.

For staff, it means much more than just getting a paycheck. It means that their opinion and ideas are valued. It means that when they are unable to be there, others know that the education offered to our students isn’t quite as great as it could be. It means that there isn’t a hierarchy of importance based on what their job in the district is. Their importance is about doing the best job they can, regardless of their job title. I understand that my job is important to the district, but in the student’s eyes, mine is probably one of the least important jobs and their day will look pretty much the same, regardless if I happen to be there. The custodian that made sure the snow and ice were removed from the sidewalk, the school counselor that smiled and said “Good Morning!,” the student that stopped to help them when they dropped their books, and the teacher who told them “we missed you when you were home sick yesterday,” is much more important than I am. Every staff member...every day...needs to feel that what they do helps all of our students achieve more.

For families, it means that we understand that they love their child, care about their child, and have great hopes and dreams for them. It means that we understand they spend many more hours with their child and have much more knowledge of their child than we do. It means that we not only accept, but seek their opinion when making decisions that affect their child. It means we appreciate that every family is unique, has unique gifts to offer to the school community, and unique challenges of their own that they face, with and without our knowledge.
I believe that the key to feeling valued is to feel appreciated for who you are...that unique mix that each of us brings to the Platteville School District...unlike every other person who has walked in the door before us and unlike every other person who will walk in the door behind us. What a perfect time of year to talk about appreciating what we have and what we have to offer. I started the article speaking about how difficult it is to make every student, every staff member, and every family feel valued. I will end by saying it is easy for all of us, together, to accomplish it. The obvious things like money, grades, and fancy certificates rarely make someone feel truly valued. Oftentimes, a word of encouragement...sincere thanks...an offer of assistance...a simple “this place would not be as great without you,” can.