

March 2021

Dear Parents:

I once heard someone say many years ago, “There is very little traffic on the extra mile.” I would like to amend that saying for the purpose of this letter to you: “There is very little traffic on the extra mile—except at Glen Lake.” The extra mile for my staff has become the road most traveled on over my almost 20 months as your Superintendent. If anything, we have had to widen the road a couple of times over that tenure, to ensure there were no traffic jams.

As a staff, we are dedicated to excellence in all we do, every day, all the time. Beyond the culture of excellence we strive to create, there is another culture we strive for and that is a culture and environment where our students know they are loved and cared for and that our Laker Family is real—that it is something you feel much more than something you hear about.

I would like to share with you just a few examples of what I have experienced with these remarkable educators over just the past few weeks that may paint a more clear understanding of what I am attempting to share with you. I hesitate to share the names of staff who are highlighted in this letter, because what they do, they do so humbly and with no desire for personal attention or reward:

- My staff is not a “punch in-punch out” group. They arrive early and many stay late, quite late, to finish one day’s work and prepare for the next day’s responsibilities.
- We have had multiple students who have needed help getting their car running properly so they can get to school and get to jobs. Yet, they do not have the financial resources themselves or within their family to pay for the work that needs to be done. We have a staff member who has taken those vehicles to their own home to fix. Whether it is work on the engine, the exhaust system, new tires or electrical issues, this person works on it until the car works and it is safe. I have seen this person do this during Christmas break and weekends, over and over.
- We have students who have mental and emotional needs that do not begin at 8:00 a.m. and end at 3:10 p.m. Many of my staff are available to our students almost around the clock, by their own choice and not by assignment. I have at least one staff member who picks up a student each morning to make sure they not only get to school but can listen and be there for them as the day begins. I have staff who receive calls and texts and emails from our students late into the evening helping them get through their latest challenge—and never turn them down or ignore the plea for attention and help.
- We have a student who lives by themselves whose car had quit on them and fixing it was not the best option any longer. A staff member and their husband chose to pay off a vehicle they were looking to move on from, and have gifted the vehicle to the student and, with the help of others, assisted that student in a number of other matters.
- I have staff who feed our students who are in need of a hot meal. I have a food service staff that provides dinners for a number of students and at times even staff that have run out of time and energy in the day—taking the extra time after hours to do so.

- I see staff walking down the hall, say hello to a passing student, and then stop and talk with them to make sure they really are doing alright. If they aren't, they stop what they are doing and put their complete focus on the student. They take care of the concern if they can and go and find help from others if they can't. This scenario is constant.
- I have staff working on a Board goal to develop a world class educational model that, from the work I have seen and participated in, is going to be incredible. We believe in no ceilings for our students or ourselves. They have taken that mantra to heart! You will learn more about this work soon and I have every confidence you will be excited to see what our staff has been developing. The work has been student centered at every turn. What really impresses me is that this work is being done in the middle of a pandemic, in the middle of a school year where the challenges we face have been magnified and the exhaustion in a day, a week and a month has been more than we have ever experienced. Dedication to excellence? For this staff, it is always.
- Fun. We focus on it. We love to laugh and smile and make a memory or two, or a thousand, with and for our students. This past Thursday when we had our Hawaiian Lua Aloha! Day, it was nothing more than to get through February (not my favorite month!), have fun, re-energize, smile, eat really good food and pretend that it was warm and balmy and not let the pandemic determine our attitudes and actions. Our food service staff took hours to make close to a hundred hand-made pizzas. Think of that for a moment, they wanted our students to have a special lunch that was personally made for them. It took many more hours to do so than to have just purchased those pizzas and warm them up. The toppings were varied with the most popular being, of course, the Hawaiian pizza topped with fresh pineapple. They then went out and purchased the creamiest, best soft serve ice cream on the market and with orange and mango being the flavors, hit another homerun with the kids. The high school softball team and leadership groups spent hours after school on Wednesday night to completely re-decorate the high school hallways from a winter theme to a Hawaiian theme. It was amazing and magical what they accomplished! It felt like we were walking into a lighted tropical forest! We had a MS student take the Laker Anchor logo and turn it into a Hawaiian Laker Logo using palm fronds and other designs. It is as professional and cool as any adult could have ever made. I could go on and on telling you about all of the decorations in the lobbies, offices and walkways outside; along with the music, the dancing and the laughter. It was a great day. One last caveat on the above—none of it was assigned. When the special day was announced, the students and staff just took over. They got creative. They got energized. They got after it and made it a day long to be remembered. I am so proud of all of them.
- Our school laundry room is, quite simply, in need of a lot of attention. We have a high school student who has designed a complete re-do of the room. We have put her in charge of the changes that need to be made. The walls, flooring, color scheme, shelving, new washer and dryer—all of it is hers to determine. She researched the best commercial washers and dryers and she was spot on with her decisions. The dryer has already been delivered and is being used. The rest of her design work will be accomplished during spring break. I share this as one example of many to emphasize that when we tell the students this is their school, we mean it. The staff follow her

direction and give her counsel and guidance as needed, but for the most part, it isn't needed.

- In our Woodshop class, we have students who have built beautiful wood "Buddy Benches" that will be placed in our new Laker Park and Playground. Some students have built gorgeous shelving units for staff members to use for years to come. Why? Because they were asked to not just build something for themselves but to serve others through their new found talents.
- We have over 20 high school student interns this year. Two of them are counseling department interns. They took over our Big Pal and Little Pal program and have created a dynamic, difference making program that now involves over 60 high school students who are committed to being there for their Little Pals multiple times throughout the week! My counselors gave a little guidance initially, then the two Senior interns took over. They developed the handbook, provided the training and oversee the attendance and efforts of all of the Big Pals. I would hire them tomorrow if I could.
- Our band program is small but growing. The band has put in hundreds of extra hours after school to hone and develop their skills. Drum Major auditions took place Friday. It has been decades since we have had a Drum Major leading their classmates. Plus, the musicians in the band sound amazing! I can't wait for you to hear them in a concert.
- Our choir and music programs have been under the able direction of a teacher that now needs to focus on her and the little one that she is carrying. While she takes that much needed time, a legend is coming back to take the reins of our vocal music program. Patrick Niemisto created the high school North by Northwest choir many years ago when he was our music teacher for K-12. I was blessed to work with Mr. Niemisto when I was the elementary principal and he is as gifted a musician and teacher as I have worked with. When Patrick knew we needed help, he answered the call without hesitation. His statement to me was, "How can I help Glen Lake? I will do whatever I can." Just like Amy Johnson-Velis, who was one of my teachers all those years ago, who took a call from me in September of 2019 while she was visiting her son in Glasgow, Scotland and listened to me explain how much we needed her to come back to GL after her vacation was over and stabilize our elementary counseling department. All she said was, "Whatever I can do to help Glen Lake, I will do it." She is now in her second year of helping our students and their families yet again, after having been there for them before during a long and distinguished career.

Why did they do it? Why did they stop everything else they had going on in their lives to come back and help Glen Lake? Why did Amy White stay another year this year when retirement was her goal a year ago? Because being a Laker means everything to them. It means everything to my staff. It means everything to me. It means doing all you must to bless the life of a child, especially when things are tough. It means being a family—a real family.

There is so much more to share with you. Our bus drivers never miss a day. Ever. Our paraprofessionals are everywhere helping everyone. Our secretaries are tireless and consummate professionals. Our building is spotless and well maintained and safe because of our custodial and maintenance crews. Our student-athletes are led by women and men who understand the real purpose of high school athletics. My principals lead by being led. They trust the teachers. They seek their input and experience. They listen and then they act.

Our care and concern for our students is not a job to us, it is personal. When they are not well and are struggling we worry and we don't stop worrying until answers are found and things begin to get better, then we stay close to them to help them not slide backwards. Compassion, caring, love. Those words are not in a mission statement, but I have often wondered why they aren't. It is our mission to ensure every student experiences those very things. We will not cease until they all do.

The extra mile? At Glen Lake, the extra mile traffic is constant and the road keeps getting wider. You have the finest teachers, bus drivers, paraprofessionals, secretaries, business office, technology department, food service staff, custodians, maintenance crew, bus mechanic, athletic director, coaches, principals and Board of Education in the state of Michigan. I believe that deeply. I get to work with these educational heroes every day. For me, they are the noble and great ones--and I am a better person because of my association with them.

With you, "We are...Glen Lake!" We wouldn't want it to be any other way.

With Laker Pride,

Jon D. Hoover

Jon D. Hoover
Superintendent