

CHAPTER 8

CONNECTING WITH STAFF

I wanted staff to be aware that my door was an open one. Staff members did not need to make appointments, and while meetings were scheduled, it was rare for folks to have to wait to speak with me. While I wanted staff to feel I was approachable, I didn't wait for folks to come to me. I was in classrooms visiting every day. Connecting with staff mattered.

Each week I gathered evidence of great teaching from my daily rounds. It was standard practice to visit all classrooms daily so I could physically view students and teachers in action. I recorded observations in three notebooks I carried with me – and shared summaries of these findings weekly in an e-mail news report called 'Barb's Bundles.' The format varied, but they usually involved a sharing of strengths (catching a teacher being great) or being very explicit about what needed to be changed on a school-wide or classroom level. In the first bundle, I spoke about challenges, the first PTA meeting, the making of home library kits, and the main problem of moving students between classes in our narrow hallways.

When asked about the 'bundles', two years later, Mr. Carter noted: "Bundles were excellent and they kept the administration team informed" (E-mail March 13, 2016). Ms. Cordova added:

I personally loved the bundles. The school where I am now sends out weekly bulletins and it tends to be full of information...that just isn't informative. I liked how you named it "Barb's Bundles" instead of weekly newsletters or something similar. You had a way of personalizing everything which I thought was very effective in making the small school feel like a community. I will admit that I did NOT like having to create my own bundle. You are a tough act to follow so I found trying to be witty and informative simultaneously challenging for me. (E-mail March 14, 2016)

Ms. Nugent noted: "THE BUNDLE—The function of the bundle is to teach one to think intensively. It provides a positive perspective that will build creativity, confidence and teamwork among talented staff and artistic students" (E-mail March 13, 2016). And Grade 3 Math teacher, Ms. LeVault, shared: "Bundles impacted the strength of the communication in our school. Expectations, schedules, development and morale were made congruous. And as a teacher, the centralized configuration of information was an appreciated time saver" (E-mail March 13, 2016).

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Looking back on my time at WEDJ, 'Barb's Bundles' functioned like a diary carving the highlights of weekly events. These bundles served as a platform for sharing teaching tips and research on best practice; as well, they provided a regular streaming of 'shout outs' – deliberate kudos, highlighting ways WEDJ staff went the 'extra mile.'