

“If you walk by something that is not up to standards, then you have created a new lower standard.” I have been reflecting on this quote from Dr. Justin Tate’s Twitter feed since I read it on August 16, 2016. Am I guilty of accepting anything but the best? What does it mean to be “up to standards?” In this age of accountability and standards, it is even more important to continually strive for the very best.

This translates not only to our everyday lives, but to the school setting as well. In schools, we talk about standards all the time. Curriculum standards, instructional standards, licensure standards, behavioral standards - all these standards dominate most of our professional conversations. We talk about the structures that are in place to help us maintain accountability to not only maintaining those standards but also exceeding those expectations. Accountability means making no excuses, owning our actions, and being answerable for achieving the standards that have been set.

We strive daily to help bring out the best in our students. We do not take our responsibility lightly. Our goal is for students to *want* to be the best at whatever they choose to do- whether that is the best trained surgeon, welder, attorney, or teacher. They must realize that doing the minimum or just getting by is the easy route and is not likely to lead to their future success. We want them to understand the importance of putting in the extra time, working extra hard, and going the extra mile. We want them to excel in the curricular areas deemed important by the Arkansas Department of Education, but we also want them to excel in the executive skills that will make them future-ready. Those skills involve integrity, character, honesty, trustworthiness, and a strong desire to do the right thing.

Other practical applications are evidenced in our every day lives. How many of us pick up a random piece paper on the ground? Do we open doors for one another? Do we help our neighbor? I speak to students about my three “rules” (borrowed from Robert Marzano): respect yourself, respect one another, and respect this place. When these simple guidelines are followed, I think a higher level of accountability is obtained. I want to encourage students to always strive for their personal best – which I hope is a moving target as that standard continues to grow. I want them to understand the consequences of the choices they make and that perception can be considered by some to be reality. How we choose to live our lives each day matters.

In the Armored School District, our mission is to provide a safe environment that promotes active student participation in a rigorous, well-balanced education that focuses on critical thinking and problem-solving skills utilizing technology and collaborative strategies for college and career readiness. Our students have daily opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through a number of different outlets.

Expansive literacy programs provide students opportunities to integrate reading and writing. Students share problem-solving strategies in mathematics and sciences. Music and art promote creative thinking and expression. Elective classes and clubs/organizations offer specific interest areas and opportunities for student

leadership. These range from the school garden to journalism to baseball to Future Business Leaders of America. Through Virtual Arkansas, our students have unlimited opportunities for elective courses in almost any subject possible. These learning opportunities help prepare students for what lies beyond the boundaries of our local community.

Personally, I don't want to be a "settler" such those illustrated in recent television commercials. I don't want to be living a pioneer lifestyle in today's modern society. I don't want that for myself or for the Armored School community. I want us to be forward-thinking and future-ready!