

PRESIDENT COMMENTARY

Mid-Winter Musings

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In the wintertime, between the solstice and spring buds, there is an opportunity to reflect on the past, center in the present, and plan for the future. The sunsets shed brilliant light on the snow with colors stretching across the sky.

The impulse to hibernate is a strong force, but the collective focus reveals ongoing activity, sometimes obvious and sometimes just beneath the surface, like the roots of bushes, trees and perennials. Advocacy and the ongoing life is drawn to gatherings at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford, and chilly trips to districts across the state to share ideas with legislators and board members over breakfast.

With this seasonal change of pace, I find myself wondering what motivates us all to stay committed to the work we do with boards of education and districts. This is worth exploring, especially during difficult times.

Whether the challenges are budgetary or related to social justice, it is safe to say we may have different perspectives and different frames of reference. We may have varying beliefs and priorities, yet we find, or sometimes create, common ground. This is central to our non-partisan collaboration, and ability to work “across the aisle.”

Our world-views are shaped by our experiences and values. Sometimes we may have to grapple with our own assumptions when exposed to the perspectives of others.

Integral to my own world-view are my urban early childhood experiences in highly diverse communities. My experiences in New Haven and New York City counter-balanced the experiences in rural northeastern Connecticut. The public school I attended in New

York was remarkable in many ways. More than sixty years later I still remember the name of the principal of P.S. 165.

Thanks to the wonders of the internet and archives, information on that school has been readily available. Sixty-plus years ago, that school had an enrollment of 1600-1700.

Demographically, less than 25% of the students were Caucasian, less than 25% were African or Caribbean American, about one hundred were Asian, and about 50% were from Puerto Rico. In the households from Puerto Rico, most spoke Spanish as a primary language. Do you remember “West Side Story”? The curriculum was innovative.

There are documents that indicate that the principal was actively involved with social justice issues, having corresponded with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. *Brown vs. the Board of Education* was a current event. Clearly, as a child I would have no way of understanding the significance of these events and contexts, yet reflecting on this helps me understand my own world view and motivation.

What I did learn was related to perspective taking and mutual respect. With the passage of time, my deep appreciation for such experiences has continued to grow. As Michelle Obama so eloquently said,

“Our glorious diversity...is not a threat to who we are, it makes us who we are.”

This is a powerful reminder to stay focused on that which is most important.

Ultimately, this is not “about me.” It is about how experience affects world views.



