

# RAWSON TURNS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY INTO ENTERTAINING ENCOURAGEMENT



**Above:** Bobby Rawson leads an encouraging, entertaining session at Crockett County's Professional Development Day. (Photo by Ron Barry)

## By Ron Barry

Anyone who's ever seen Bobby Rawson coach a volleyball match knows he can be intensely and seriously focused on the task at hand.

Anyone who's known him away from the volleyball court knows he loves a good laugh and he's a huge advocate of lifelong learning.

So with a new school year approaching – and facing the prospect of sitting in the audience for yet another time in his storied academic career for the obligatory “Professional Development Day” – Rawson took a proactive approach and pitched a featured speaker idea to Crockett County Director of Schools P. A. Pratt and Supervisor of Curriculum Judy Hoover, who organizes the day for all school district personnel.

The speaker suggestion? Rawson himself.

“I've sat through 28 of these things,” Rawson joked to his captive audience in the CCHS Little Theater Friday. “If I don't have something useful to share after all these years, then I haven't been a very good steward of my time.”

So share he did, in one of the most entertaining – but constantly encouraging – programs the CCSD family has ever witnessed.

Rawson, described as “a Level 5 teacher every year” in Pratt's introductory remarks, weaved a mixture of interactive games, humorous videos, sound advice, and actual gathered input from other administrators, teachers, parents, and students, to highlight a day when personnel from all five Crockett County district schools gather.

Assisted by rising seniors Kylee Garrett and Sadie Hoover, the almost 30-year veteran mathematics and calculus teacher ran the gamut from take-offs on game shows like Card Sharks and The Dating Game to The Tonight Show's Jimmy Fallon “Thank You Notes” to improvisational theater, utilizing five system teachers as his “actors.”

Lest anyone think it was just for fun and games, Rawson interspersed each section of his presentation with tested, valuable advice from his own long and successful career.

He centered his talk around “The Dash,” a Linda Ellis poem that challenges the reader to consider the symbol featured in the middle of your basic tombstone: the “dash” between the dates of birth and death. “What matters is how we live and love and how we spend our dash,” the poem reads.

“What are you doing with your ‘dash’?” Rawson questioned his listeners. Aiming specifically at the teaching aspect, he structured his remarks around five main points: (1) Know your students' names; (2) Build relationships; (3) Listen; (4) Smile – Teaching is funny!; and (5) Be the teacher you wanted in school.

“A simple thing like actually learning and remembering a student's name gives a boost to that student every time,” he said. “It actually triggers dopamine in a student's brain [the substance that brings pleasure to the mind] and draws each student closer to the relationship phase you want to build with them. You're their teacher – NOT their friend, so you need to enact discipline and set necessary boundaries – but you can have a massive impact just by letting them know how much you care about them.”

Rawson encouraged younger teachers to seek out those with the most experience and pick their brains about how they handled certain situations.

“You may feel like you're bothering an older teacher,” he said, “but you're NOT! They actually LIKE getting a chance to share their knowledge with you.”

Rawson – who effectively models all the points he was making, although he'd automatically deflect any praise toward God (which would not be surprising, as he's also a minister) – made particular points about incorporating interactive learning, humor, and actual listening (including awareness of the non-verbal signals you might be emitting) into each teaching situation.

Much of his presentation – with sizeable credit going to those teachers who “volunteered” to participate in his games – had many of his fellow teachers doubled over with laughter throughout the day, perhaps highlighted by the improvisational play in which “director” Rawson led five “actors” through the same scene, but in themes ranging from a soap opera to a western to a Shakespearean drama.

Each scene featured a single flustered teacher reacting to a child who had witnessed another child throw up in yet another child's backpack; a student with an emergency, uncontrollable urge to go to the restroom; another complaining that the teacher never allowed her to go to the restroom; and a fourth child who couldn't breathe because he'd stuffed a crayon up one of his nostrils.

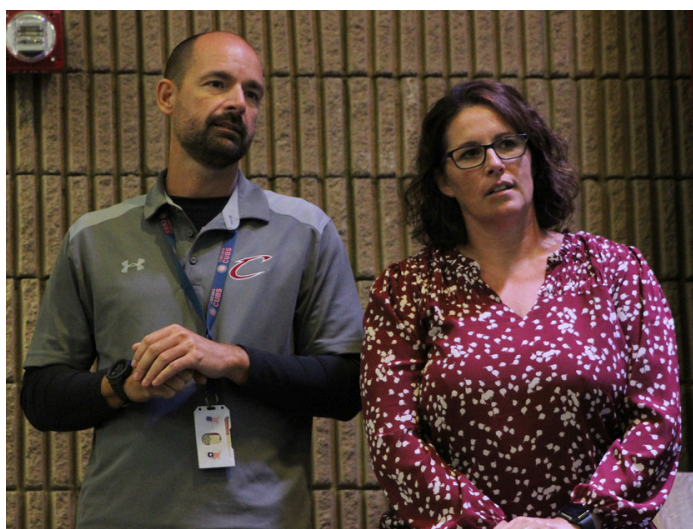
During the Shakespearean drama theme, the line "To pee or not to pee!" nearly brought down the house. Rawson used the scene to illustrate the times a teacher will inevitably feel overwhelmed and perhaps powerless, but that looking for the potential humor in each situation could often ease the tensions.

His presentation capped a day in which CCSD personnel also learned about current trends in drug overdoses in West Tennessee from the Northwest Tennessee region director Melesa Lassiter of the Weakley County Prevention Coalition; the new Isaiah 1:17 House from Carol Barraza, which will assist youth facing transitions to Child Services; and the initiation of a new app called Loop from Keith Eason, Crockett's IT Director.

Open Houses at each county school are set for July 30, with the first day of school following on August 1.



**Above:** Crockett Director of Schools P. A. Pratt makes introductory remarks prior to the beginning of training sessions. (Photo by Ron Barry)



**Right:** Doug and Jenny Wede team up for a question-and-answer game -- which also featured putt-putt golf skills -- during one of Bobby Rawson's sessions. (Photo by Ron Barry)



**Above:** Spencer Bursey takes clues from the audience in a photo identification game on a screen behind him. (Photo by Ron Barry)



**Left:** Sadie Hoover, also a rising senior, was the timekeeper for the initial game played Friday. (Photo by Ron Barry)



**Below:** Rising senior Kylee Garrett prepares to keep score during the first contest among the games in Friday's Professional Development Day. (Photo by Ron Barry)



**Above:** Former Crockett students Madison Webb (left) and Liv Morford -- now back to begin their teaching careers together in the district -- combine for an answer to a game played in Friday's sessions. (Photo by Ron Barry)

**Below:** Misty Bailey, Crockett's Director of School Health, introduces a session on the drug overdose situation in West Tennessee and what CCSD will be doing to combat it. (Photo by Ron Barry)



**Below:** Melesa Lassiter, the Overdose Prevention Director for Region 6 (Northwest Tennessee) headquartered in Weakley County, gives an informative presentation to help teachers recognize the symptoms of potential drug overdoses they may see in the schools and what they can do to save lives. (Photo by Ron Barry)



**Left:** Crockett's Supervisor of Curriculum and Instruction Judy Hoover organized the day of sessions and serves as a valuable resource for teachers throughout the system. Photo by Ron Barry)



**Above:** Crockett's IT Director Keith Eason informs the gathering about the use of a new app called Loop that allows more efficient communication between teachers, students, and parents. (Photo by Ron Barry)

**Right:** At the end of the day, new Maury City Elementary teacher Madison Webb claimed the biggest game prize of the day, taking home \$100 for winning the Card Sharks event. (Photo by Ron Barry)



**Right:** But the true winners of the day were the listeners who engaged with veteran teacher and coach Bobby Rawson, whose smile and reminder that "teaching can be funny" is a hallmark of his own success in the classroom. (Photo by Ron Barry)

