Greetings,

Being a superintendent of a school district means so many different things, especially in this changing world. What has not changed is the amount of hours required and consequent time away from family. Sure, anyone who dedicates themselves to work and values the impact they can have can easily get lost in it. As I reflect on my years and the amount of time I have spent working to support my respective learning communities, including staff and students, I feel like in many respects I lost valuable time with my own kids. As a father of two kids that are now in college, it's hitting me that you don't get that time back. While I rationalize it and tell myself that I was modeling hard work and dedication with the hopes they would pick up on the value of sacrifice, I struggled with the idea that perhaps I should've given more weight to simply being present.

I also think about people who have to work multiple jobs or long hours just to make ends meet. I empathize because in many respects, they have no choice as the need to support themselves and their families has to be prioritized. Yeah, we can reflect on our parents and admire the fact that they worked to afford us a comfortable life, but I still lament the many times I missed certain events, worked late hours, and felt like my own children were not the priority. Then in many respects, I think about the role I've played as a teacher and educator in the lives of so many children that come to school to seek that love and support - the hundreds of kids over the last 27 years that I've really dedicated myself to serving and being that positive influence in their times of need. My work has been rewarding, that goes without saying, and I don't have regrets. Still, I wonder if I could have done a better job at balancing it out.

I guess my message is two fold: First, let's appreciate that for many of our learners, we serve in that parent role and provide the emotional nourishment that kids so desperately need. Regardless of a child's home circumstance, they may be craving that attention and the validation that they matter and that they are loved. Schools play an incredible role in that regard and not only for the students you'd suspect. Second, it's incredibly important that we tend to our own families and be present. I guess I'm missing my kids and as I watch them grow into adults, it's bittersweet because on the one hand, I'm so happy for them, and on the other, I miss when I could hold them in my arms and make them laugh with my silly Papi antics - though I still make them laugh, usually at my expense.

This weekend I'll be visiting my kids at Virginia Tech and I'm really looking forward to it. Their one request is that I cook for them which at first I was like, c'mon, I ain't going down to work! But honestly, the request made me feel loved and valued and how could I not? As they grow, these moments become more and more fleeting and we need to appreciate them.

My commitment to our community is unwavering and I really cherish my time with our students and staff. I do my best to be a source of positivity and support in whatever way I can. I think we all do in so many respects. Our learners depend on us and we need to make sure we are there for them. We also have to be sure to value our families and ourselves. Both can be true. Whether you have children of your own or not, please fill your cups by being there for the people who matter the most in your lives. Don't just spend time together, but be present and in the moment!

So I am off to Virginia! My kids and I will be pseudo observing Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year in Judaism. My kids don't fast, so it's not a full observance, however it's a day of atonement and repentance and we use it as a time to reflect on the year that has passed and close it out, giving us a fresh start to be our very best in the year to come. So to our Jewish friends and community members, I say *g'mar chatima tovah*, which means *a good final sealing.*

As always, it is a true privilege serving you as your superintendent of schools! Have a great weekend!

Tony Santana

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