Greetings,

While November Rain is an incredibly sad ballad by Guns N' Roses, I'm so happy it's finally raining. The pitter patter of the rain drops on my window just a couple of nights ago was really music to my ears and it was nice not to have to rely on *Alexa to play* the sounds of a rain to help ease me to sleep. More than that, the threat of wildfires oddly felt real considering the fires in Canada last year that resulted in orange skies and in California the year before. As much as we love sunny days, I think we're all grateful for the couple of days of rain we've had. Yes, the proverbial yin to the yang.

Ironically, earlier this week I attended a day-long workshop on *polarities.* The facilitator referenced a book, Polarity Management by Barry Johnson, which defines polarities *as interdependent pairs that support each other in pursuit of common purpose. They can also undermine each other if seen as an either/or problem to solve. Polarities at their essence are unavoidable, unsolvable, unstoppable and indestructible. Most importantly, they can be leveraged for a greater good.* Some examples of polarities are structure and freedom, self-care and care of others, continuity and change, candor and diplomacy, reflection and action, and academic achievement and whole child achievement.

We often find ourselves trying to solve polarities and engage in emotionally charged debates when we feel one side of the polarity is favorable to the other. Like academic achievement over whole child achievement - some may believe that schools need to focus on academics and academics only, I mean we're learning institutions that prepare people for college and careers. That other stuff is simply fluff. (*That certainly was what my school experience as a student back in the day!*) Others really believe that we need to focus on social and emotional learning above all else. I mean, how can kids learn if they are in distress or lack the emotional intelligence to navigate life's hardships, let alone math and reading? I can already sense reactions as I am drafting this message, but I think everyone can appreciate where this is going - we kinda need both. Both ends of this polarity have their merits and both have their flaws, but both are entirely necessary for the success of our learners, especially now. It's like the breathing polarity, some like inhaling and others exhaling, yet we need both to survive.

What resonated with me about all this was the idea that we need to learn how to value and manage polarities and the function they serve, not struggle to eliminate one side or the other. Again, how often do we find ourselves caught up in conflicts that are unsolvable? More than

that, we also assign value to conflict when conflicts are neither good or bad, just things that need to be worked out. Like a kink in a hose, it simply needs to be straightened out for the water to get flowing.

As much as I'm the perpetual optimist, there is a place for negativity, especially when it comes to feedback and the articulation of concerns. I would even argue that my positive attitude and outlook is completely dependent on what can be deemed as negative - how else would I be able to grow as a person and professionally if the skies were always sunny? And as I find myself telling my own kids when they recover from strife, we cannot appreciate good times without going through some bad and in the end, it's all good if you manage your response and grow from it.

Yes, our work is challenging and we often feel unjustly scrutinized. Given all the rhetoric surrounding public education, on top of the perpetual feeling like we are not doing good enough, I can easily see why we would feel discouraged or down. Or, we can choose to appreciate whatever value or truth is embedded in the things that are upsetting and use it to better ourselves. It ain't easy, I know. But we do have choice on how we respond and forge ahead. More than that, if we choose to stay on the negative side of this polarity, ultimately the world becomes entirely negative and we only perceive what will confirm this bias. There really needs to be a flow between both ends of this polarity with the goal of landing somewhere that is healthy for the body and soul. It's important to identify what's not working, but when that's our only focus, then nothing begins to work in our own personal realities.

Sorry if all this is too philosophical or idealistic, but these are in fact challenging times. I feel it and I find myself telling people that I feel like we're in an era of perpetual full moons. Still, this does not impact my resolve and my desire to promote our little niche in the world as a fantastic place to be and learn. We have to acknowledge the challenges and work them out to get the energy flowing again. I believe in our desire to grow and achieve and in the love we have for our learners, young and old alike.

What makes all this easier are my interactions with students and staff that constantly remind me of my *why*. Whether it's visiting the high school curriculum fair and seeing students and staff excited about their learning opportunities, attending Bow Tie Thursday at Frank P. Long, our Junior National and National Honor Society induction ceremonies, or simply walking around Kreamer this week, I'm constantly reminded of how great South Country is. Not to mention

everything amazing that is happening in all our schools. I respond to concerns, but don't allow them to frame my perception and truth.

Ultimately, the sun will shine, but I'm excited and relieved it's raining out, even if it's November rain. We needed it.

Thank you as always for your dedication and passion. It is a privilege to serve this amazing district. I wish you a relaxing and joyful weekend filled with moments that remind you why South Country is such a special place.

Tony Santana
#clipperPRIDE