

Greetings,

As we head into Thanksgiving week, I'm going to steer clear of work topics for a moment. Not because they aren't important, but because sometimes it feels like our minds are constantly juggling the next task, the next deadline, the next crisis, and the next "what if." I know I'm not alone when I say that stress—work, life, family, and everything in between—can slowly take up more mental space than we mean to give it.

My son, for example, is knee deep in his senior year and wrestling with engineering concepts that are basically like ancient hieroglyphics as far as I'm concerned. His stress becomes my stress and while I'm not doing any engineering work, I certainly empathize. And my mom, who thankfully is recovering well from her cataract surgery, still finds plenty of energy to be cranky with me. *That, she hasn't recovered from.* So yes, there is love... and there is stress.

But all of this has me thinking. How many hours, days, or even years of our lives do we lose not to difficulty itself, but to the way we *think* about it? To worrying about things outside our control? To replaying conversations we cannot undo? To anticipating things that may never happen? We do a lot of living in the past or the future, and very little living in the moment we're actually in.

And I want to be clear, for some in our community, this year may be heavy. Loss, illness, financial stress, loneliness, fractured relationships, these things are real, and they deserve compassion, not comparison or minimization. If this season is difficult for you, I hope you feel seen, not pressured to feel festive. Sometimes gratitude isn't loud or joyful, it's quiet, fragile, and found in small moments of light.

But even in challenging seasons, there are things, sometimes tiny things, that help us stay grounded:

A warm cup of coffee without having to multitask.

A walk in crisp air.

Laughter you didn't expect.

A conversation that feels safe.

A quiet moment before the chaos of the day begins.

A pet who celebrates your return like it's a national holiday.

A meal shared with someone who cares.

A memory that brings more peace than pain.

And for me, despite everything swirling around this year, I still feel lucky. Lucky to work in a community that feels like home. Lucky to walk through schools and see the spark in

kids' eyes. Lucky to witness staff pouring their hearts into students. Lucky to see families and community members showing up, cheering, volunteering, caring. Those are the reminders that help me breathe a little deeper and step back into gratitude.

So next week, when Thanksgiving arrives, let's do our best to not spiral about the questionable comment a relative may *definitely* make. Let's not get consumed by the cooking, the timing, the dishes, or the cleanup. Let's be present—not perfect. Let's enjoy the people we love... even if they occasionally test our patience.

And maybe, just maybe, we can all give ourselves permission not to solve anything, fix anything, or anticipate everything. Just breathe, be there, and notice what is good.

Wishing you and your loved ones a joyful, peaceful, imperfect, human, and heartfelt Thanksgiving.

Be well, and Happy Thanksgiving. 🍁🍁

And as always, it really is a privilege serving this community as your superintendent of schools!

Tony Santana  
**#clipperPRIDE**