

# 'The secret is ...' Reflections on 25 Years of Working Together as Educators

---



I have so many things I can share about my 25-year-plus working relationship with Tom (Superintendent Dr. Thomas McMorrان). It is important to note that he is one year older than I (at least that is important to me!)

Let's see, we began teaching together at Ridgefield High School in the late '80's. We used to brainstorm about our professional goals. We asked each other what our plan 'for 30' would be ... then we had a 'for 40 plan' ... and a 'for 50' plan ... I'll stop right there!

We shared similar goals for the teenagers we taught. He taught English and I taught English for students with special needs. We knew these students were bright and capable of learning — we just needed to figure out the best ways to reach them. One class we were team teaching took place during the lunch period. The students would be in class for a bit, then break for lunch and return for the second half of class. That 'return to class for part two' was always a challenge. So Tom had an idea — we would start a novel and begin reading the book aloud five minutes before part two of class began.

Tom has a fondness for science fiction so we read works by Alfred Bester, but my favorite was the Stephen King short story “The Jaunt” about teleportation — thinking hard enough and being transported to a different place. “Jaunting” became our code word in every long faculty meeting, late board meeting, or anytime we found ourselves in a situation where teleportation would have come in handy. Anyway, between the two of us narrating, students were lined up at the door early just to hear us read to them.

Tom and I were both mentored by Dr. Dianna Lindsay Mattern. We were in Williamsburg in September before the world stopped to celebrate Dianna’s wedding. We refer to Dianna as our Queen Bee and often return to the hive to get energized by her vast perspective of public education and assurance that we aren’t the only crazy idealists left in administration. I can hear Dianna’s Boston accent clear in my head as she must be thinking, “It’s about time you retired, Tom — that job will kill you!”

At Barlow, when I was the assistant principal, I was known as the “principal whisperer.” Over our long relationship, it became apparent to both of us that sometimes Tom needed a translator. His visionary thinking would have him three bends down the river and someone would need to keep returning to the troops to assure that we were traveling in the same direction.

You may have heard this story before (and I have the binder at Barlow to show you), but when Tom put his hat in the ring for the superintendency and I agreed to serve for a year as the interim head of school, Tom left me a binder that read, “The Big Book of Being Head of School,” noting on the cover that everything in the book was summarized on page 18. When one opens the binder they find only page 18 which reads “... the secret is ... ” and the rest of the page is torn.

I saw that page and laughed. A few weeks into my tenure, the page made me angry — how could he leave such little direction for me. But as I continue to serve as assistant superintendent and head of school at Joel Barlow High School, I realize the page was a gift. Tom always has had confidence in my abilities as a teacher and as an

administrator. He knew that I would take this new role and make it my own.

I will miss our partnership. I will miss his super-power of recalling every book he ever read and who wrote it and pulling up the most obscure quote or apt metaphor to make a point. Tom is a visionary thinker with a big brain and bigger heart. His mother should be proud of him!

Read about Dr. Thomas McMorrان's pending retirement at the end of the school year [here](#).