

## WORDS WORTH REPEATING . . .



In lieu of this issue's "In the Balance" article, we are reprinting an article that first appeared in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*. The author, Virginia M. MacDonald, is a substitute teacher from Buffalo, Minnesota, whose insights are both humorous and poignant.

# IF CLASSROOMS RAN AS FOOTBALL TEAMS RUN

by Virginia M. MacDonald

### WHAT WOULD HAPPEN . . .

#### IF WE RAN OUR FOOTBALL TEAMS AS WE DO OUR CLASSROOMS:

- Everyone would have the right to equal playing time so that all could develop their athletic skills equally.
- Cooperation would be more important than excellence. Competition would be frowned upon.
- Since star athletes are already talented, they would not need special coaching or conditioning. They could help teach other athletes, since "to teach something is to really learn it."
- We would "coach to the middle."
- We would strive to develop well-rounded athletes. Thus, the star quarterback would take a turn sitting on the bench as a trainer. The student of lower analytical skills would get a turn as quarterback. The out-of-shape student who hates physical activity would get the opportunity to play running back.
- Coaches would be expected to be understanding when jobs, family trips, or homework interfered with practice time by flexibly adapting game plans to accommodate such multiple interests.
- Coaches would be assigned parking lot supervision duty immediately before and after games and during halftime. If athletes had questions about game plans, they could meet with coaches in the parking lot. Coaches would have to plan their plays before or during supervision duty.
- Coaches could not demand too much of students lest they create stress or interfere with many other interests and priorities.

- If the team had a losing season, new philosophies of coaching would be developed. Each new philosophy would discard all previous philosophies. It would require a two-hour training session and supply the coach with a pocket folder crammed with philosophy and objectives. Coaches would plan their new strategies between supervision duties and games.

#### . . . IF WE RAN OUR CLASSROOMS AS WE DO OUR FOOTBALL TEAMS:

- Teachers would walk into class enthused and fired up with the importance and relevance of what they were teaching.
- Students would be in class because they want to learn. They would respect the teacher and put all their energy into the class. Class would be more important to them than their jobs or football practice.
- Parents would jam the schools asking the teacher how to help their student excel.
- Students wouldn't dare miss class or skip doing homework lest they be dropped from the academic team.
- Students would develop a sense of teamwork and cooperation fueled by their love of learning and challenging of each other. Students would take pride in their classes and demand that their classmates give their best.
- Students would clamor to be "student of the week" or make the honor roll. Other students, teachers, and the community would enthusiastically and supportively be involved in student learning.

- We would have rallies and bands and cheerleaders for National Merit Scholars and honor students. And they would not feel uncomfortable about receiving the attention because this would be every student's dream.
- Every night, the 10 p.m. news would devote a full 10-minute segment to education issues and highlights. The morning radio stations would compete for the education audience.
- Newspapers would devote several pages (or a whole section!), complete with pictures, to academic activities.
- We would demand excellence in the classroom and teach cooperation and patience on the playing field.
- Our society would clamor to build and equip learning facilities because everybody would recognize the value of well-educated citizens to the business community.

This is not to underestimate the importance of educating all students of all needs and abilities, nor to imply that the only form of learning is academic. It is to question why excellence is prized on athletic fields, but the aim of academics is too often the median melting pot. It is to question why new sports facilities are seen as vital to the business climate, yet there isn't enough money for educational facilities; why, when coaches ask for what they need, the community listens, but schools are expected to adapt and make do. It is to question why star athletes are heroes while top students are snobs, elitists, too competitive, intolerant. . . .

Think about it. You wouldn't consider asking an athlete to mask his or her ability on the playing field, yet we ask our academically talented students to do this with regularity.

As a society, what values are reflected in the choices we make? What are the results? If we are serious about wanting a nation that will lead and compete favorably in the world economy, where must our priorities lie? ■

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