Scott Lueck May 15 2015

Oscoda High School

C: It is May 15th 2015 and I’m in Oscoda High School with Scott Lueck who is now the Assistant Principal. In 2008 you were teaching…

S: I just finished my last year of high school Economics, Psychology, Leadership and the next year I was going over to 8th grade Social Studies.

C: All right.

S: I taught 3 years of 8th grade Social Studies, my only class during the day other than Intervention.

C: So you taught 6 years total?

S: Three years of high school and three years of 8th grade Social Studies.

C: And you were a Group Social Studies major and minor was?

S: My minor was Psychology.

C: Oh, right, right. How could I forget that! Ok, so first question and two parts to this: How do you define success in teaching and you can go from this from both points of view, success from what your teaching was and success as you see your teachers now, as an administrator, and do you believe Grand Valley State prepared you for success in the classroom?

S: The second part I will say, “yes” for sure. I’m very happy what I learned at Grand Valley and what they did and especially some of your classes because when you get a teacher teaching you how to teach and they used the strategies that they talk about that just makes it easier other than somebody talking about, “Hey, you should use this strategy and you should do this strategy” but most of the classes, not just yours, but some of the other classes actually they showed you how they used the strategies and definitely prepared me. That’s an easy answer. Defining success, I think, comes from the students. The students are successful. The students like coming to your classroom. The students like or respect you, one of the two. Hopefully both, but you don’t get kids who are not wanting to come to class. They want to come to class. They want to come to school. It’s successful because they are showing that they are learning. They’re demonstrating that and then they’re demonstrating the fact that they want to be in school. So we can only teach them so much if they’re not here. So right now I’m mainly the attendance officer and so when kids are having poor attendance or sketchy attendance they see me. I meet with them. I meet with their parents. We send them letters. We do truancy. We do all that stuff. So you get stories of, “Well, I have Mr. Lueck First Hour and I just don’t like the guy and I don’t want to get out of bed.” You get stories like that. That’s not success so the best teachers…kids want to come to class. They’re on time. They want to learn and then through the pedagogy and through the relationships kids demonstrate learning.

C: Now you mentioned truancy so do you actually go to the home?

S: Truancy officers will. We are now a 7th through 12th grade building. When I first got hired to be the assistant principal it was a 9-12. That was for one year, and then they moved over to a 7-12 so we’ve got more kids. So we do a little bit more with truancy with the younger kids, but the mandatory age went up to 18 so we do have some 16, 17 year olds that we do meet with but I don’t go outside to the home. I do the letters. I do the meetings. We have a pretty good partnership with Family Court. The kids will actually meet with Family Court before they actually get petitioned so it’s a pretty lengthy process but it’s a card we use in our favor and so if kids get to that point or parents get to that point we pursue them.

C: Chris mentioned yesterday and I have a former student that I met already at Davison in Genesee County, they had some tough times since GM crashed that they haven’t recouped from and I know and Chris mentioned yesterday like I said, in terms of poverty this is like the second ranked county?

S: It’s actually…county-wide…I think Cheboygan is one…Cheboygan County is one and we’re two in the state. For sure. Our free and reduced lunches have dropped a little bit…

C: Oh, that’s good.

S:…from 72 down to the 60s so it’s getting a little bit better but we have a pretty diverse population because we have water so we have money (tourism and summer homes) that comes from water. We have the Ausable River which draws a lot of summer tourism.

C: Right.

S: And we have some pretty successful businesses. We have Colletta Air, the cargo company, jet engines and repairs and maintenance. It’s a big company and there is 4 or 500 employees right there and some of them do pretty well.

C: Ok, back at it. (Principals’ time might be more precious than teachers at times.) Is there anything else that you want to add to answers for Question 1?

S: No, I think Grand Valley prepared me because pedagogically I also think Marty’s Diversity Class was one of the best classes was probably one of the best classes I ever had because I took that class when I was having kids and it just made you realize all the things that kids go through in life. You just can’t…you have to understand that these kids are somebody’s babies and you have to treat them right. Her class, the way she taught it, I don’t know if it was different for other kids or not, but that class was phenomenal. And then the pedagogy classes where you learn how to teach I thought the professors did a good job teaching them and as I went on I would go to class and evaluate the professor on whether they were a good teacher or not. (learned to critically analyze professors’ pedagogy)

C: Well, that’s good though. I mean you should.

S: You think, “Is this guy using good methods or not?” So that was kind of fun. You learn a lot that way.

C: Number #2 and part of this study is based on the horrid statistics of new teachers leaving the profession because it’s commonly cited that there’s this long term study where 30 to 40% of all new teachers leave the profession totally, they’re gone, in the first four to five years and that’s, at least in this small cohort within this study only 3 have (left education altogether) which beats the national average like crazy so part of this is to find out, how you’re still doing this, and even though you’re not a teacher, you’re obviously still in education.

S: I’m addicting to the paycheck. I’ve got bills to pay.

C: Scott, I know you’re lying. I know money is important but that’s not what you’re doing here. What do you view as the biggest challenges to your career? Both as a teacher and as a principal?

S: Time. The biggest challenge is time. What the state has put on school districts to put on teachers and it’s pretty drastic. There’s more paperwork. There’s more prepping. There’s more evaluating state tests. There’s just a lot…I don’t think our superintendent put it on us, I think the state puts it on us, and the superintendent puts it on the principals and the principals put it on the teachers and sometimes there just isn’t enough time. Even 10 years ago I felt I could just shut my door and teach, but then every year it seemed just more and more would get poured on. And then I think money doesn’t solve all your problems but some of the funding issues have caused drops in employment so people take on more work. Like I said, I’m taking on athletic director next year for budgetary reasons and so when people get more put on them it causes stress. If you’re 24 years old and you’re making $32,000 a year and you’re stressed to the max, you’re looking for something in the newspaper that pays $32,000 a year that’s 8 to 5 because there is jobs out there like that. Now some teachers, part of that number is they don’t get tenure. We knew that. We had teachers who we didn’t think were outstanding and we didn’t keep them so it’s by choice or by force and sometimes it’s by force. You can, you can make $40,000 a year working in a bank, 9 to 5 and you don’t have to call parents or meet with parents or do conferences and so (shrugs his shoulders) there are other options out there and we see it all the time. We don’t see our top 10% going into education. They are looking at nursing fields or anything medical or engineering. Sadly we don’t see a lot of them, “Yeah, I want to be a teacher.”

C: Since, I want to say, the last four years, the number of majors in Group Social Studies or History teaching or History with teaching certification at Grand Valley has dropped by more than half. So we were close to, I think, when you went through, we were close to 8 or 900 total for four years or five years and now we’re down to, I want to say, 300, and they’re going, like the Traverse City program, if somebody wants to major in Social Studies they have to be “streamed in” because they won’t send a professor up there.

S: We had 30 kids in a class (in Traverse City).

C: Yeah. So the last time I taught the methods class or the Capstone I streamed 5 students in (from Traverse City) because they wouldn’t send me up there because it’s 5 students.

S: Oh, wow.

C: And now we don’t have any majors at all (in Traverse City). Health professions has got a lot of majors.

S: Teachers get beat up in social media and newspapers. Teachers get beat up. Schools get beat up. It’s the popular thing to do so it’s hard to convince somebody you can go change the world with 30 kids. And you’ve got to have that belief. You’ve to got to be born to do it now. You’ve got to see the importance of kids and education. Otherwise if you don’t see the value in that then you’re not going to see the value in the money or the time or anything like that.

C: Oh, right. Or the stress. So what methods have you adopted, and if anything, you’re…I would assume you’re under more stress than you ever were before, and you’re going to add to your stress next year, how to you deal with it? And the caveat I always throw on this is, “In a nondestructive way”. So if you have any destructive ways you don’t have to mention that.

S: Yeah, I don’t use alcohol as stress relief.

C: That’s good to hear Scott.

S: Part of, it’s ironic, maybe, I think, part of what I do that causes stress is my stress reliever. I coach. I still get a chance to coach and I think coaching is my stress reliever. I can’t wait to go to practice but that’s also one of the things that adds work to my load so I have less time to do it but I still run the youth football program because my youngest son just finished 6th grade. So I won’t run the youth program for football anymore but I will be involved it but those practices were 6 o’clock and those practices were fun. You had fun with kids and so to me that’s a type of stress relief, the coaching. I like to play cards and things like that (the Davison teachers played Cribbage during their lunch break). We have a local poker room that does, a charity poker room type thing and I just love to go down there because nobody wants to talk about school. Nobody wants to…they don’t care who I am. They just want to play cards and have fun. So I have things like that. Outlets like that. Try to do things like that with the family. We try to go down to…we love the Loons’ games (minor league baseball team) baseball games, things like that, so we go…we try to get involved with athletics as much as possible but I always see coaching as stress relief where some people think it causes stress but I don’t know what I’m going to be able to do with coaching in the future (now that he’s athletic director and assistant principal) but that’s a kick in the teeth (he knows he will miss coaching if that comes to pass) but we will see.

C: I totally identify. A little bit less (stress relief in coaching football) in football. The practices were always stress relief. Some times the games were not. But baseball was totally. I got to run around with the kids so I totally understand what you’re saying there.

S: Yeah, I wish I could get addicted to exercise but…(he laughed like that wasn’t going to happen)

C: Well, interestingly…

S: It’s a big stress reliever but not for me.

C: Everyone up until this point, everyone that I interviewed they do (exercise). They bike or they lift or they yoga or something like that.

S: I need to get that into my schedule for sure. I eat.

C: Yeah, me too. (We both laughed) That’s stress relief too but that might be a little bit destructive. What motivates you to stay in education? To best serve the students?

S: Service to the students. Service to the community. I love it. I’m not going anywhere. I’m not looking for a job. I’m not looking to get out of education. Like I said, my youngest son is in the 6th grade. When he’s done if I want to look at something else, actually I’ve always thought about Grand Valley. I’ve thought about what I’m qualified to do at college. I think about things like that. When my kids go away to college and I start looking for things like that but I don’t have a desire to get out of it. There’s probably not a lot of I’m qualified to do. You know I had the construction background and I don’t know if there are jobs for me at Colletta to get into jet mechanic. I don’t know that stuff but I wouldn’t say I’m staying in it because I have no other options but I like going to school. I like seeing kids every day. I like most teachers, 90%, most teachers are positive. If they can stay positive it’s good to see those people every day, you’ve got really strong relationships. And then you get to see the success. You know if the kids graduate and the open houses and any type of successes in the classes. It’s just what you want. And that’s why we got into it. And I didn’t realize it until later in life. I was 30 years old when I got into it but once you realize it. I don’t know if I was born to do it or something just clicked at some point. It’s something we do.

C: And there’s a good mix in the study of both traditional and nontraditional (students). But all comes back, I mean everybody at this point, and so far this time around, if it’s not for the kids, love what they teach, but it’s obvious that they are here for the students. What changes, boy, if any, have occurred in the strategies and the methods you use in your classroom and that’s changed obviously because you’re in administration but in the six years who were teaching did you see any changes in the way you taught?

S: The integration of technology would be the biggest and then the differentiation of instruction because that was the big buzzword as we were just leaving college. This would be 10 years ago. That was some of the big buzzwords was differentiate and at first you think differentiation is using the different taxonomy and there was a lot of times when I tried to deliver the material in many, many different ways so every kid would get it. But then with differentiation you have kids at different learning levels. And like I said in my last interview, you have the valedictorian, you have special needs kids in the same classroom and you have to teach them both and that’s difficult. So you look at different intervention strategies so how you’re going to get those interventions in the regular classroom is a big deal and then integration of technology. We’re looking at going 1 to 1 at the high school next year so…

C: Yeah, Chris mentioned that.

S: Yeah, then over at the elementary school so they will be very close to 1 to 1. It will be different because they will have labs and we’ll have actual machines for kids in their hands but the way that you do that and get that in has changed a lot. The 14 year old kids now just expect to have technology in their hands because it’s been that way before they were born so since they were in school they have been on some kind of computer program doing something so we’ve got to find that mix of using online resources, online materials, online testing, things like that. So we’ve got the kids’ interest, it’s efficient but it’s almost expected that they’ve got a lot of technology at their disposal.

C: And I was shocked, I think when I left Kansas they were just moving keyboarding into the middle school and then, I maintained contacts with my friends in Kansas and told me that a couple of years ago that they moved it to 3rd grade and Chris (in Oscoda’s elementary school as technology teacher) told me yesterday that they are doing it in kindergarten now. Which it makes sense, because like you said, “Before they even come to school...” they are interacting with technology…

S: They are because you go on a car trip and the kids in the car seat have a video (suspended from the car roof) or they have something (he motions like a handheld device) that they are playing. I wouldn’t say it’s a babysitter but it’s a management strategy for sure. So when they do get to school you’ve got to find ways to integrate that.

C: So once you left the classroom, my first question, I guess, is, my first question still has to do with strategies and methods, do you still see yourself as a teacher, even though you are assistant principal?

S: No.

C: You just sort of moved out of that.

S: I don’t. I don’t. This year has been the worst for getting into classrooms. I’m worried that next year is going to be worse (with his added duties as A.D.) because I like to get into classrooms to help with classroom management. Because I can get in, just my presence. (He points to himself in humor but he is an athletic guy.)

C: I wouldn’t mess with you.

S: I guess that’s out there somewhere (the physical presence as an athletic male.) but just my presence being in the classroom and then I can help the teacher if I see something that they need, but I do less and less of that every year. I still do some teacher observations and evaluations. I don’t think I’ll do any next year.

C: Really?

S: No. The principal does mainly all of that. My first year we would go in together. The principal that was here we would go in together and work through them that way but there’s so much to do that the principal we have now he does most of them. I do the Phys Ed Department and that’s K-12 so I go to the other building. I do all the P.E. teachers just so there’s continuity going through (the Department). I don’t know if I’ll do that again next year but I do have some professional development that I do. I get out in front of the teachers and present. At the beginning of the year that went really well. A lot of teachers thought that went really well. If I had to do it I could do it. I have no doubt in my mind I could that I could teach if I had to but I don’t get a lot of opportunities to do it so right now I’m more of an intervention strategy for some teachers and whether it’s the learning part or the classroom management part, the discipline part, that’s kind of where I’m at.

C: The other guy who is assistant principal, they have four assistant principals at West Ottawa High School and so he’s the instructional leader for the staff. He doesn’t handle discipline or classroom management. He does evals but as much as possible they try to divide the four assistant principals into the areas of their original majors. So he’s actively observing Social Studies majors, plus, I think English and maybe one other department. But he says that’s a workable load but they have the money and they have the staff to be able to do that. So there’s less of a time press. He didn’t mention that as a stress (time) on him but it’s a whole different situation. What types of evaluations, both, again, when you were a teacher and both, now, are you evaluated as a principal and then looking at it from the administration’s standpoint, what types of evaluations, both formal and informal are used or were used to assess your teaching and how were these evaluations used to better your teaching? And, again, you’ve had two hats, so…

S: We still use all the Danielson stuff.

C: And you were using that before when I talked to you.

S: And I used it when I was a student at Grand Valley so it was awesome, awesome. (The “awesome” comment because he was used to the eval model and therefore he was familiar and easy to work with in his current position.) So I used it at Grand Valley and stuff and I landed in a district that uses it was cool. It helped a lot. So we still use that. There’s some Marzano stuff in it, but it’s good because if the administrator is good at it they can show the teacher, “You’re here. Here’s what you have to do to get to here” and I, like I said, my first year I did a lot more of that and I had teachers that came in that were my friends and they’re like, “Why am I ineffective? You gave me 5 ineffectives. It’s ok. It’s ok. You have all year to (improve). And some of them were just minor stuff. So, “We want to see the kids do this” or “We want to see you do this” and I wasn’t trying to ding them or anything like that. They get a little upset and I, “No, use it as a tool to improve”. Or use it as a tool to get them on a plan for long-term improvement, but it never was anything that I thought should be intimidating. It was a tool for improvement and we have teachers who understand the tool and they’re at the tops of a lot of them (indicators). So it’s good to have that consistency. We have, for me as an administrator, we have, I don’t even know who developed the tool but it’s got 16-20 different things that I’m evaluated on and part of it is, “How good are the teachers?” and “How are you making the teachers better?” and the student discipline and the student attendance and perception of the building. When you walk in do you see a clean building? Do you see kids in the hall or kids in the class or what do kids do when they’re unsupervised, like when they are at lunch? What type of supervision strategies do you have there? So every year we have an IDB goal. Everybody in the district, bus drivers, custodians, superintendent, everybody in between has a goal every year. Mine this year was around communication. Last year it was attendance and the year before, I think, it might have had something to do with discipline, but you have a goal and then we make sure you have a plan to achieve that goal. I had some communication strategies to work on, I guess. I know I tell it like it is.

C: Or you need how to transfer phone calls (as a possible goal. This was a bit of humor because he messed up a phone transfer during the interview.) No, I’m not going to do that.

S: That was my phone. I can pick it up.

C: Adam Smith said there was a reason for division of labor. Not everybody can be good at everything.

S: Right.

C: And so you then have people who are specialists. Types of mentoring: Question #7. What types of mentoring were provided for you when you came here and how would you characterize the results of the mentoring that was provided for you?

S: When I came a Social Studies teacher who probably was considered, is still considered the Social Studies Department, but we’re a small enough district that we don’t really have those labels and it doesn’t pay, I had a teacher that was my mentor and there’s a once a month meeting type thing. I didn’t have a lot of meetings with him. He would come in and ask me if I had any questions or any thing like that, but there was an assistant principal that probably helped me more than the teacher did. If I had questions I would go to both of them but I think I had a knack for the teaching part (I would agree with that comment, based on the two classes of mine that Scott had with me) so I don’t think I needed a lot of mentoring regarding teaching strategies.

C: I saw that in the Methods class (SST 310) Scott, to be honest with you.

S: More the mentoring was just some logistical things like, “What do I do when this happens? What do I do when this happens? Who do I go to for this, that and the other thing?” Mainly it’s the paperwork of having a job and medical insurance and when you have medical insurance questions, who do you go to? It was that type of mentoring that I needed. (Mike Hull was providing that kind of help at Davison, partially in his role as Association President, but it seemed like he was the “go to guy” anyway.) Teaching wise I think I was always ok. And I’ve never been told different so.

C: So from the administration side now, is there assigned mentors when you have new hires?

S: Well, we have three administrators in the district. We have a superintendent, a high school principal, high school assistant principal and elementary principal. He doesn’t have an assistant. We’re looking at different ways of getting him some help for next year. Between the three of us, my first year there was still four, and I was assistant principal and the principal was my mentor and our offices were connected like they are now so we did a lot of things together. Partly because that is the way he liked to do things but he was also close to retiring and we didn’t know if I would be the next principal or how things would work out. So we did a lot of things together and I did learn from him and the opening for my position came because one of our administrators when to superintendent so when he left an administrative job came open. He and I had a pretty good relationship and he and I talked about me applying. Through the process I got the job so the superintendent is also a mentor for me. And he’s a very good friend of mine and he’s very tough on employees. So it’s a pretty good balance. There’s been times when he just comes in and says, “You and I need to go for a walk. Guck! What did I do?” You know, “What did I do?” and you know maybe it’s the way I didn’t handle something properly or talking to a parent or something like that or he gets a phone call and he needs me to clarify something but it doesn’t happen much but the fact that he is a friend of mine doesn’t…

C: Get in the way.

S: It doesn’t help me if I’m doing something wrong. So, he’s pretty stringent and that’s a good thing. He’s a mentor. Since my fourth year (as assistant principal) there’s been three principals. Mr. Nigro retired after my first year. Mr. Kennedy, who was in our district, and he was the assistant principal before me, they moved him to the 3-8 building and I went to the Assistant Principal. He came back to be principal and he and I were together for two years. He retired and now we have Mr. Allison, who was an administrator in the district north of us, Alcona and he’s from Oscoda. It’s a great fit. He’s got probably 7 or 8 more years left, for sure, so I wouldn’t expect there would be that turnover but that really hasn’t been a problem. Because the superintendent has been here…

C: There’s some continuity.

S: But Mr. Kennedy had been here so it wasn’t like he was a new principal coming from an outside district. And actually I knew Mr. Allison outside of school because he was a principal to the north and we just talked and we knew each other so that really hasn’t been a problem even though there’s been turnover but you learn from each. Like I said, Mr. Nigro had been here thirty years. Mr. Kennedy had the assistant principal job before I did so if I had any questions or things like that…and Mr. Allison, he pretty much did it all where he was at. He was the only administrator for 7-12 so it was a pretty good pool of resources for me to get through. Even though Mr. Moore had limited jobs, he was still pretty sharp. I got lots of mentoring from him.

C: So back to the question about teachers though, when you hire a new teacher, do you, is there a mentorship program? Do you assign someone to that teacher?

S: Yep. There’s new teacher professional development. And then there is a mentor. The written requirements are once a month meetings with attendance turned in and discussions and whatever they discuss they turn in. They turn that stuff in. So they get it from a teacher but we also have some new teacher professional development that comes from administrators.

C: So they get a couple of different levels (of mentoring). 8. And I obviously already know the answer to this, but have you pursued continuing education either in the form of a graduate program or professional development and how has this education influenced your success in the classroom? So you’ve got your Master’s.

S: All through Grand Valley. I’ve got hundreds of Grand Valley State University credits. And 12 Grand Valley State College credits. Other than the stuff I took at NMC (Northwest Michigan College in Traverse City) everything was Grand Valley so I, my Master’s was Ed Leadership. I started it through Traverse City, kind of in that area, and then they actually had a cohort that came here. So I used to tell people that, “I used go to Grand Valley and now they come to me.” So they actually held classes right in my building for my, for the last few classes that I had so it was pretty cool. So the people came in from the area that did that so that worked out. Right now I don’t know what I’m going to do for my next…I don’t really think that I’m going to look at Ed Specialist or Doctoral Programs, but you never know. I mean I’m so busy that I can’t imagine doing it. But I’m getting to the point now in my certification that I have to start taking classes and I have to figure that out, if I want to do something at a university I probably need more education. I just don’t know if I want to do that so I got to get that figured out. We have all kinds of professional development for continuing education but I have all the degrees I need for the job I have, I just don’t know if I want a different job. So that was my graduate program. The nice thing and I think Jerry Judge is retiring. You know Jerry Judge?

C: I think I met him a couple of times.

S: He does the Ed Leadership program and, of course he’s one of the professors. He’s retiring. The teachers we had for that I thought were very strong. All were administrators or retired administrators and the wealth of knowledge that they passed onto us was fantastic.

C: You saw that as very practical?

S: Oh, very. You’re getting, like you said, the practical versus just a professor. You had people who did the job for 20 years. Even though we talked about some of the changes, some things don’t change. You’ve got to manage people. You’ve got to manage a building. You’ve got to deal with parents and bosses and you know how that stuff doesn’t change and you’ve got all those different strategies that they used and they passed on to us so I think Grand Valley does it right and I try to tell people that. We send some kids over there. I push pretty hard for Grand Valley. They go for physical therapy right now. That’s the big one. Kids go over there for that.

C: Besides the older “new” building downtown they bought a acreage on the other side of 196. They’re going to level houses and build that campus up more. So literally since I have been there since 2001 they have built at least one new building a year every 18 months so library last year, new science building this year.

S: Is the library on campus?

C: Yeah.

S: Really?

C: Well, they have a downtown library in Grand Rapids, then they have this brand new 5 story thing that is an “information center”.

S: I was trying to think the last time I was there.

C: You can look at it on the web page. If you ever want to come over for a visit I will give you a tour.

S: I do. We’ll be over there for a football game next year.

C: Ok.

S: Either homecoming or Saginaw Valley.

C: Well, we’ll meet up. We have to beat everybody. We’re tried of losing.

S: It’s tough here.

C: Ferris. Ferris is “bad”. They’re good, that’s the problem. So you feel like your postgraduate training has definitely helped you out?

S: Absolutely. Absolutely. If there is anything I don’t get that I would probably like would be able to talk to some of those people after graduation. (Another comment directed at more active contact with our grads beyond informal emails or Alumni Association.) We emailed but we don’t talk a lot, but the people that I had for those classes there is really not communication back, you know questions and things like that, but I don’t know if I can expect that either. You know you might get high school students who might come back to high school and ask teachers about things and like that but once you graduate there’s not a lot of communication going back to that whether it’s just web sites or Facebooks or blogs or things like that. But that would be nice to go back to people who trained you and ask questions and things like that.

C: I have good news. Every 5 years we have to do a strategic plan and one of the keynotes of our strategic plan is to grads. So we’re going to find more and more active ways to be able to deal with that and we just went through external review and they cited that part of our strategic plan as something that was really, really positive. So now the question is making sure we do it and that’s a whole other thing.

C: What would you tell current students to make sure they know before they start teaching? In other words what do you wish you knew before you left GVSU before you started your career?

S: I think last time I answered this with “local politics” and I don’t know how you learn local politics before you take a job.

C: Yeah, I don’t know either.

S: Yeah, you don’t. It’s just something you need to expect and it’s all different. The superintendent we have right now graduated from here in high school. He’s now the boss of some of his old teachers.

C: Whoa.

S: So you have the dynamic of “local boy done good” and he’s fantastic. The last superintendent had no education background. She was a business lady. So sometimes when education questions came up sometimes people thought she was micromanaging sometimes. “She has no educational background so…” She was still good in her own way so the local politics of what people think of your leadership, you have no way of predicting that. And you may not want to ask that question in an interview but you need to understand that there is going to be local politics. And whether it’s “good old boy network” or a superintendent that you never see. A superintendent that shows up in classrooms. Board members in the building. You don’t know but you need to understand that it’s a part of teaching. You don’t shut your door and teach. There’s a lot of communication, a lot of interweaving of a lot of people involved in education. They want to know what you’re doing “to challenge my kid? What are you doing for the state test? What are you doing for this, that and the other thing” and I don’t know how you prepare for that. You just need to expect it and find out who’s going to be in your corner or who you are going to later on because it’s tough. It’s tough. What do I wish I knew? I don’t know. How much the state’s going to get involved.

C: How can you predict that either? That’s another toughie.

S: There’s so much with what the state expects that sometimes it just makes people shake their heads. “Do they really know what they’re doing?” The State Superintendent, I think, understands education and understands how things are going to be put in place and things like that but some of the bills you see that they try to pass I don’t know if they are the best for kids and teaching so you can expect to have people question what you are doing all the time, all the time. And if anybody says, “the only thing you can expect is change” whatever that saying is, “the only constant is change” so you’ve got to be prepared for that and you have to have a good attitude about it and people who do have a good attitude about it don’t struggle. They don’t. Many times I’ve told my boss, “Just tell me what to do. I’ll do it. I’ll do it. I don’t care. I know I’ll be teaching kids tomorrow morning so just tell me what to do.” So have a good attitude about that.

C: If you’re not flexible, you’re in trouble.

S: Yeah. And if there’s some type of pessimist/optimist test you can take in college, and you’re a pessimist, it really should be part of the interview program because if you’re a negative person nobody wants you around. And if you get too many negative people who just question everything it makes things more difficult. Because there’s going to be change and if you’re going to fight the change it makes it more difficult for a lot of people. (So when do you know when to question change?) Versus the optimist who, “Hey, this will work, we will just do it.” Some things, some strategies get changed every year. “Didn’t we just change this? Yeah, we did.”

C: Yeah, “here it comes again.”

S: Sorry!

C: And you reinforced a couple of things I tell my students all time because it is part of my core beliefs: #1: “Your door is always open. Even if it’s closed it’s always open. And you better expect that and you’re going to be held accountable by different groups of people and if you don’t feel comfortable with that then you should probably find a different line of work.”

S: And you need to be really good and secure that you’re really good. If you’re not secure in what you are doing then you are in trouble because it’s on Facebook. “Somebody said this to my kid today.” “Well, yeah, it’s not really what I said, but…” Whatever. But if you feel good about what you’re doing is right and people are reinforcing that for you, you’ve got to have thick skin because you teach. And you confront the negative people and say, “Hey, this is how I do things and you really need to make sure you get the whole story sometime.” But that was probably one of the big changes since we met last was the flow of information (impact of social media and other ways information, both correct and false, gets broadcast). And how you control the flow of information.

C: Good luck. I don’t see how you can.

S: Me too.

C: That’s like, “Rate Your Professor.com” “Ok, is that really me or… maybe not, maybe yes.” Last question, #9 or maybe #9. Was there any information that you would like to add about teaching career or your administrative career that would help the study or would help other students? Or help the general public?

S: What I would like to add?

C: Like I didn’t ask you and you just have a burning desire to release it?

S: Oh, I know. Be a problem solver. Part of my job, I kind of supervise the paraprofessionals. In our building now I couldn’t be happier with our paraprofessionals because they come to you with ideas that they think will help, for managing kids at lunch, or managing something and they always come with solutions. Where some people are the problem to every solution. If you see something that you think needs to be addressed come with a couple of ideas of how you think we can make things better because we’re on the same team and there are some people who don’t believe that. They just want to come in and say, “This is wrong.” “Ok, you might be right. Please help me fix it. I’d be happy to.” So be willing to be a problem-solver not just looking for help all the time. I think we had a chance to do a lot of that, too, through Grand Valley because I think we had to have 220 hours of internship, or whatever it was, 225 hours of internship, and we got a lot of stuff put on our plate. “You’re going to do the MEAP schedule. You’re going to do the personnel schedule. You’re going to do…” So we just started doing stuff like that and you get a pretty good idea of what it’s like to be an administrator before you become an administrator and that’s just good, that’s just good things. I think Grand Valley did a good job preparing me. They forced you to do, “you are going to do a classroom management plan because you’re going to need one when you get there.” Mine was 30 some pages and I tell kids all the time, “My last homework assignment was 155 pages.” What?” “Yeah, my last paper was 155 pages.” And then I show it to them. Be willing to be a problem-solver. You can just always look for people to help you. You can’t figure out what every problem is going to be so have a good attitude. “We just sent out the fire drill schedule and it’s during a MEAP test.” So instead of complaining about it in the lunch room with your other staff members, send me an email that says, “Hey, can we not have a fire drill during the MEAP test? Hey, that’s a really good idea! Thanks!” Instead of just saying, “Lueck’s an idiot! Doesn’t he know…” Yeah, I probably knew it. Just forgot.

C: And that’s something I think that needs, unfortunately, that maybe needs to be repeated all the time that is, “We’re all in this together” and if you have a culture where everybody from the custodian on up buys into the fact that we’re all into this together then you have to have a better organization and if they don’t…

S: We have a lot of that. I think there’s one thing that we’re fighting; the finances, it puts everybody into a fight and what it has forced us to do is one year contracts. So every year everybody is negotiating and it’s hard to say you’re all on the same team when this bargaining unit wants this and gets told “no” and that makes it hard. If you could just do 3 or 4 year contracts because there’s more stability you don’t have to have that fight every few years so we deal with that. But our superintendent, he has opened up a lot of communication avenues. We meet with, we call it “Roundtable”. We meet with the top union in the bargaining unit for teachers every month.

C: Every month?

S: Yeah, every month, so they can come and if they have something they need to air or air for other teachers that don’t want to speak up, so that helps. Executive cabinet meets once a month so that finances can talk to transportation can talk to athletics can talk to administrators so we have a lot of that going on. I have student focus groups that I try to meet with if I need to hear from the students, as far as scheduling and this, that and the other thing so instead of polling 95 students I got 5 and I bring them in and just talk. We have those communication avenues. It’s a good gig. I’m not going anywhere.

C: Thanks Scott.

S: You’re welcome.