

In the week between Christmas and New Year's Eve, newspapers experience a slow news week so they rehash the news of the previous year. I've always hated that. It's like we've been through it once, often annoyed by it, so why live it again?

At the risk of hating myself, I decided to do a little review of 2018 for the district. While rehashing old news really has little value other than filling space in a publication, an organization does benefit from remembering where it has been. It sometimes answers the question, "How did we get here?"

We started January 2018 on the solution side of what appeared to be an extreme uptick in students with behavioral problems and mental health needs. After investigating and studying the problem throughout fall of 2017, it became clear that we needed counseling services in the elementary schools. At its regular January meeting, the school board graciously and wisely approved contracts to provide those specialized counseling services.

A week after that occurred, the PA Attorney General released a misleading report making it sound like we and many other districts had hired bus drivers with questionable pasts. We quickly set the record straight explaining how a technicality in the law on legal clearances was at the heart of the matter and interpretation of that law (which I still contend OUR interpretation is correct) was really the issue and not the character of our drivers. We subsequently held an appreciation breakfast for our drivers to underscore our support of them. Our response was born out of an effort to do the right thing and set the record straight but it was nice to later receive an award from the Public Relations Society of America's local chapter on how we handled the situation. (Kudos to our highly capable communications specialist, Marissa Orbanek, who among other things, took the sharp edges off my original written response which erupted after watching the six o'clock news. Well, she pretty much rewrote the whole thing so it didn't sound like a string of Trumpian tweets.)

In early February, we called a late start to have nationally recognized expert on anxiety, Kim Morrow, provide training to our staff on how to recognize and deal with anxiety in children. Interestingly, having this late start for this purpose caught the attention of the media and our efforts were highlighted in a national publication for educators called, District Administration Magazine. Kim came back in April and provided the program for parents. Both trainings were really well received and we use the information almost on a daily basis.

As soon as the Auditor General thing referenced above was put to bed, the shooting at Parkland High School in Florida occurred on February 14. Unfortunately, there have been many school shootings over the years, but there was something different about this one. More people were rattled by it than I've seen in a long time. Like we've done many other times before, we used this incident as an opportunity to review our plans. With a new School Resource Officer, José Montes, taking a look with a fresh set of eyes, we decided to send four people to ALICE training, instituting a different "options-based" approach to a school intruder. We later sent four more to become trainers.

Safety continued to be a large focus as we prepared for the coming school year. When the teachers returned, the first day of training was focused on ALICE training and the use of a new app called Navigate Prepared. Collectively, thousands of hours of training were logged as we aligned our plans with the best possible strategies.

In fall of 2018, we also convened a strategic planning team to review district procedures and think about the future. You will be reading more Lancer Letters on this in the future as the process is continuing with school teams looking at the ideas generated by the steering committee.

Oh, and by the way, we continued to teach reading, math and all the other subjects while running robust extracurricular programs and dealing with society's ills as they rear their ugly heads on a daily basis with students and parents. No wonder we all need a "long winter's nap!"